



# Video Story Transcript

## Small Town Silence

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xihDEP474uw>

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Note : The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, my name is Scott Whitehair. Oddly enough, it all started in a place called the Freedom Inn. The Freedom Inn was a bar in my hometown, where my college improv troupe got to do a monthly show. And we were excited because we were ambitious and we thought we were hilarious. Um, so this was a great opportunity for us, not only because we got to go on stage, but we get to open for traveling comedians, who would come from around the country and do a show every month. Ah, now, the shows were OK. We, ah, we got paid in onion rings and bar food. And although the audience was surly, we got some laughs. And we felt that we were right on the right path. Now the... one the most exciting parts was we would approach these road comedians after they were done and we would ask them questions. Ah, we felt like we had access to the pros. We would say, you know, "Can we get you a sandwich? Can we get you something a drink?"

And then we felt that was the permission we needed then to pepper them with questions like, "What is this life like? How did you get into it? How did you get an agent? How do we all become rich and famous through this improv that we're doing in bars?" And the comedians would mostly accept our drinks and food and they would speak to us.

But they weren't into it and most of them, the advice they give us, would be things like, "Oh, do you want a happy healthy life? Don't, don't get into this." Ah, they were pretty bitter. They were jaded. Um, they ate up the food, drink a lot of the drinks we get them and, basically, discourage us from following it any further.

But one month, there was a comedian named James. He was a younger African-American man who, immediately, when he got on stage just brought a different energy than had been in this bar in the times we'd been there before. And he, he just lit it up. He was getting laughs from a crowd that was often pretty surly. He

shut down a heckler just with a disapproving glance and kind of, a, a kind nod of his head. And he didn't play down to this crowd like a lot of these comedians, he, he elevated them. And we were excited. So as soon as the show was over, we walked over and we said, "James, if it's OK, we'd, we'd like to buy you a drink and some food." And James took a look at us and said, "No...I know you guys get paid an onion rings. I'm, I'm buying the food."

And he talked with us and he talked to us for an hour. And he answered our questions and for the first time, we felt like somebody was supporting us. Somebody who had made it as a comedian. Who was doing this with their, their lives was taking the time to encourage us. Letting us know the ins and outs, the practical stuff. How he had gotten into it. Why he had gotten into it. Where he thought it would go. And we, we were so excited. And as my improv team started to filter out to go home, I hung out longer. And James and I got to know each other even better. And we were at the bar, regulars were still hanging out, and we started to, to throw back and forth and set each other up. You know, he would throw some up and I'd bad slam it home. It was like a two man, two man show at the bar. And it was probably better than most of the shows I had ever been in that people have asked me to do. And it was exciting and I, I felt like I was being taken seriously.

And so at the end of the night James and I were still sitting there having a great time. So as the bar began to, to close, he said, "This is a great time; what else is going on in town. Is there anything else for us to do? I'm still, still ready to make a night of it."

I thought about it and I said, "Oh, yes, actually. Down the hill near the river, there's, there's a club. And it's a private club so they are allowed to stay open past the 2 a.m. closing time in the Pittsburgh area. And they sell you a membership for the night. But that just means it's kind of a, a cover charge and you get to hang out. And James said "That sounds good. Let's do that. I'm into it."

And Bill, the bartender, had been standing there. Just quietly washing a glass said, "Scott, They're not open tonight."

I was like, "What, what are you talking about Bill? They're open on Christmas Day. This place, I don't think, they ever close. Of course they're open."

Bill said, "I'm telling you guys they're closed."

And I said, "Bill it's Saturday night. There's no way that place is closed."

He said, "Trust me, they're closed."

So James kind of shrugged and said, "I'm going to the bathroom; maybe we can figured something else out to do. I'm still, I, I get that energy from a show and I'm ready to do it."

So he hits the restroom. I kind of look at Bill. And Bill says, "Scott, they don't let black people in that club."

And I started to protest and say, "Well, of course..." But then it kind of washed over me. I had never seen a person of color there. Even though it was located in a predominantly black neighborhood, I'd never seen a person of color in this club. And maybe it didn't register because I had had a few drinks or it just didn't hit me, but it hit me right in that moment.

Before I could say anything back to Bill, James came back and he said, "It's a shame about that place, man. Sounded like fun." And I, I just didn't say anything.

The bar closed and we decided to go down the hill. The other part of town to a diner that was open all night is get some food instead and James was into it. So we go and we continue the conversation. If I got to know him before as a comedian and a pro, I got to know him more as a person. He got to know me. We had conversations about what our childhoods were like, why comedy was so important to us, the way we had been raised, and that proceeded through life. Talked about deeper ambitions and goals and where we wanted this to go, not just as a career but what it would mean to our lives. And I, I again, I felt just so taken seriously and so engaged as a person. I felt like I was making a friend. So we're sitting there we're finishing our waffles and somebody comes in who had been at the show earlier. And they sit down in a booth next to us and they noticed us. And they say, "Hey, it's the comedians. Hey, how come you guys didn't go to the late night club?"

And James says, "Well, oh, they're close tonight."

A guy goes, "That place never closes. It's Saturday night." And then I think James understood that something was off. That he hadn't been told the full truth.

And so we sat there and we finished our food. We finished our coffees and we didn't say much else. Turned back into small talk. When the bill came, James grabbed it and paid. And we went outside to the parking lot. Still I said nothing. And so we stood there...in silence. And instead of the hugs we'd shared all night, and the familiar language, James just stuck out his hand and said, "Good luck with everything." And as I watched him drive out of the parking lot of the diner, and up the road and out of my life forever, I was ashamed. I was ashamed of my town. I was ashamed of the people in it that would let something like this exist. But, most of all, I was ashamed of my silence.