

## **Danger Road: A true crime story of murder and redemption**

### **Chapter 1**

Client: John P. Contini

On April Fools Day 1983 I was in a Fort Lauderdale bar getting a buzz and trying to hustle some nameless girl. Poor thing, she was as lost as I was — only neither of us knew it.

“Can I have another beer?” I asked the bartender.

“I don’t know, can you?” the smiling bartender replied facetiously.

Sporting a Hawaiian shirt and a tan, this wannabe comic behind the bar looked like one of the Beach Boys. He provided the perfect visual to blend in with the fragrance of suntan lotion and the sound of the Jimmy Buffet song cranking away in the background. *Wasting away again in Margaritaville...*

He put another bottle of light beer in front of me and asked, “So, do you live here?”

Not sure if he was asking if I lived in Fort Lauderdale or if he was being sarcastic about my recent nightly appearances in the bar, I chose to answer the more straightforward question.

“I just moved down here to stay with my father. I’m waiting for the bar exam results,” I said while raising my eyebrows to signal my uncertainty about whether I would ever be a lawyer.

“You keep killing those brain cells and you’ll have nothing left by the time they make you an attorney,” he quipped, laughing good-naturedly.

“You gonna be a *lawyer*?” asked my potential target on the next barstool, sitting up a little straighter.

“Oh, *now* you’re interested,” I responded, teasing her. I leaned in a little closer to her, figuring I had nothing to lose.

Just then, the overhead lights by the entrance turned off and the dance floor lights blazed on. Under that kind of wattage, I could see my barstool-mate was no belle of the ball. But she did a double take, too. I didn’t exactly look like anyone’s Romeo after a hard day of drinking at the beach.

In that bright light, the streaked bar mirror revealed that my hairless baby face looked tired, and my brown hair was sand-matted and sticking up all over the place. And as if that weren’t enough to attract the lonely young waif, my tanned face had white rings in the shape of my cheap sunglasses. They made the perfect frame for my tired, bloodshot eyes. I was just the kind of guy you’d want to take home to mom.

“Last dance, last chance for romance,” crooned the DJ, as the bar-back cleaned up around us. Aside from the weight-challenged co-ed in the Ohio State T-shirt and the old guy flashing his Rolex knock-off to her, everyone in the bar emptied onto the sandy and slippery wooden dance floor.

“Can my future ex-wife and I have one more for the road?” I slurred, figuring I needed it now more than ever.

“Oh, great,” she complained playfully, “we haven’t even started yet and I’m *already* your ex?”

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Little did I know that while we were flirting and drinking, three men were being murdered in Miami. I also was clueless that seven years later I would be retained to defend the ex-cop accused of being their cold-blooded killer.

The jury was out on whether I had killed too many brain cells that night. With any luck, I had at least a few left. That bartender was right; I was going to need them.