The James DIZ Long story Part II

Join the Call & Post as we take a look at the life and times of James E. Long, better known in Cleveland's history as "Diz." A notable enforcer in the city's underworld, the story of James Long goes from the early days of the Majestic Hotel all the way to Las Vegas. The Diz Long story explores what it was like during the '60s and '70s as an enforcer for some of Cleveland's top players and hustlers involved in the Black numbers racket. We are featuring short excerpts from his book.

One of the results was that, as a teenager, I had a tough time. I got into a lot of trouble. In time, though I found there were things I was good at. I was an athlete. I could box and, when I got older, I played football, even for a short time in the pros. Some years later, I won regional boxing championships. I could run like the wind and, when I was in the service, I was fast enough to get sent to the Olympic tryouts.

It wasn't easy in the beginning, though. By the time I was fifteen or sixteen, I was out of control, having several brushes with the law. The family I was living with didn't want me around anymore, and I kept being moved from one special school or social institution to another. When

I was old enough, or almost, the service seemed like a way to get out from under things. World War II was still going on, and I enlisted in three different branches of the service: the marines, the army, and the paratroopers. I lied about my age the first time I enlisted. I was only sixteen at the time. I kept getting into trouble in the service, too. That's why I ended up trying three different branches. But my athletic ability helped me a lot, and I served briefly in the famous all-black parachute unit, the 555th — the Triple Nickels.

After I left the service, I played some professional football in both theU.S.andCanadaand eventually came toCleveland. I worked for the city and for Carl Stokes, the first Black mayor, and I got involved in the numbers. I was mainly in collections and the muscle end of things. It was a good time for me. I was still young. I had money. I had clothes. I had Rolex watches. I had big cars. Over a period of years, I had six different wives. And it seemed like I was always around famous people. When I worked for a while, as an emcee at the Majestic Hotel and the Chatterbox inCleveland, I got to meet people like Billie Holliday, Ray Charles, Dinah Washington, and Dizzy Gillespie. (I liked Dizzy Gillespie's music so much my friends started calling me "Diz" and the nickname stuck). Anyway you looked at it, I thought I had lived quite a life. The memories helped make up for the physical limitations.

Deciding to write it all down happened almost by accident. After moving into my new place, my new friends and I would end up telling each other the stories of our lives and I found that people were really impressed with mine. They kept telling me I ought to write it down and finally I decided they were right and that's when I decided to get some help. It was that simple. What wasn't simple was actually doing it.

At first I thought it was going to be cut and dried. I was going to remember the events of my life and make a record of them. I knew I would need some help writing them up, but I thought my story would tell itself and, after that, what could be simpler? What I worried most about at first was whether my memory was still good enough. Would I be able to remember all the things that were important? What I discovered after we got started and began having to answer a lot of questions that helped jog my memory. I remembered a lot more than I thought I would. During the course of the process of creating a first version of my story, my ideas about what was most important started to change.

You can follow Diz's life as The Call & Post provides excerpts from his book "Always on my own: The Biography of James E. (Diz) Long."

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