

Whatever Happened to Bobby Johnston?

by Jenna Willis

Inspired by true events.(2006/7)

Audience listens to "Lil' Red Ridinghood" by Sam the Sham & the Pharoahs. A spotlight slowly shines on a table that displays a folded American flag. The ghost of Bobby Johnston dressed in Navy fatigues walks towards the table and drapes the large flag over the table. The music volume slowly turns to off as he sits in a chair next to the table.

In 1965, mamma took my brother and I to sign-up for the service.
Mama said we needed structure.
We were always instigators of trouble.
George, he went into the Army.
But me, Bobby, was thinking about a career in the Navy.
That didn't work at all like I planned. (Smile.)
I remember one time, I was on base in San Francisco
but I had left my car at home in San Jose.
Without a second thought, I stole a ice cream truck.
The whole neighborhood had ice cream that weekend.
So near the end of '66,
I was a young guy, just turned twenty and I was stationed at Treasure Island.
I know I checked in, (Confused look.)
but I don't remember checking out.
(Stand up.)
Joanie knows I would of been there for George,
our little brother.
It was '68 and they called it a "motorcycle accident."
He was only twenty and on leave from his Army tour of duty in Thailand.
George was just on his bike sitting in the store parking lot
when all of a sudden a station-wagon comes rolling in and runs him over.
Joanie was left all alone,
like when we were kids.
When mama just turned away from her life and started a new one.
One day, mamma told us that she wasn't going to be home after school.
She said she was taking George, since he was the youngest and moving to east San Jose.
It wasn't long after that we found out the reason.
She was pregnant with a black man's child.
When we were young in the '50s,
us kids hardly ever seen any colored people.
But when we did, we would just stare at them.
Mama told us they were chocolate people,
we liked chocolate, so they were just fine with us.
I lived with George, mama, her husband, and my half-sister and brother for a few years.
I didn't feel like such a dork anymore.
I felt comfortable with my new life in a black community.
That was before the Navy.
After a weekend leave, I left my car at mama's house.
Hey, now I remember something.
I returned to base.
Payday was a couple more days away,
and like always I didn't have any money due to my love of gambling.
(One foot on chair.)
So I checked into Treasure Island Naval Station
and was never seen or heard from again.
The next morning all of my belongings were there.
My clothes, wallet, and even my glasses that I always wore, even to bed sometimes.
Everything was there, except for me,
Bobby Johnston, one set of fatigues and dog tags.
White or black, my family always believed that my killing was racially motivated.
Maybe my death was accidental.
(Confused look.)
I don't know, I just don't remember.

Sure, I gambled and was real friendly with blacks,
even had a black girlfriend.

Back in the '60s,
those things could have been the cause of big trouble.
(Stand on chair.)

All my life, I had been an outsider.
In the Navy, I had felt like a big bad wolf balancing between two worlds.
(Stand on flag.)

This FBI agent, Mr. Sheets,
he kept calling my mama and sister asking them if they'd seen me.
Of course they hadn't, I'm dead! Still stuck on Treasure Island.
But the FBI didn't want to believe that, no they thought I'd gone AWOL.
My family knew that wasn't true.
(Kneel on flag.)

There's a plaque for George and me in Oak Hill cemetery.
Mama cremated him but not me,
there's just an empty space.

(Sit on flag.)
In '97, the Navy called mamma,
it was about the time the demolition started on Treasure Island for it's closing.
The Navy wanted to talk to her about her son, Robert Jackson Johnston.
She wouldn't talk to them, didn't want to hear anything they had to say.
She died about a year later.

(Off flag.)
So, I guess no one will ever find out what happened to me.
But somebody,
out-there,
does know,

Someone knows what happened to Bobby Johnston.
Owoooooooo!

(Walk away from flag while spotlight slowly fades.)
"Hey there Little Red Riding Hood.
You sure are looking good.
You're everything that a big bad wolf could want.
Owoooooooo! I mean baaaaaa! Baaa?"