



DYLAN CARRILLO-BACKGROUND REPORT—*NOT FOR PUBLIC RELEASE*

How a Bartender from El Paso Ended Up Running the TRC Research Center

If you had told Dylan Carrillo a few years ago that he would someday be running a privately funded research center in Mesilla, New Mexico, he probably would have laughed.

If you had told him the research center would eventually contain thousands of documents, photographs, maps, recordings and films connected to some of the strangest stories he had spent his life studying, he might have laughed even harder.

But he probably would have hoped you were right.

Because for Dylan, **The Mesilla Files** began long before there was a TRC Research Center.

A CONNECTION TO MESILLA

Dylan Carrillo was born in El Paso, Texas, and spent part of his early childhood in the Las Cruces and Mesilla area.

Later, he moved to Denver to live with his grandparents.

New Mexico was no longer home, at least geographically, but Dylan never completely left it behind.

In college in Denver, he studied history. Whenever an assignment gave him enough freedom to choose his own subject, he frequently found himself returning to southern New Mexico.

Mesilla fascinated him.

There was the documented history—Spanish settlement, Mexico, the Gadsden Purchase, the Civil War, Billy the Kid and the complicated development of the Borderlands.

But there were also the other stories.

Stories that didn't appear in textbooks.

Disappearances.

Unusual lights.

Old desert legends.

Stories passed from one person to another that were impossible to document but equally difficult to completely dismiss.

Dylan studied those too.

HISTORY FROM BEHIND A BAR

During his twenties, Dylan worked numerous jobs.

His favorite was bartending.

The money was decent, but that wasn't the only attraction.

People talked to bartenders.

And Dylan discovered that if someone mentioned New Mexico, Mesilla, El Paso or some obscure piece of Southwestern history, he could keep the conversation going considerably longer than most bartenders could.

Sometimes he probably kept it going longer than his customers wanted.

He talked about history.

He talked about Mesilla.

He talked about the old legends.

And he listened.

Dylan learned that the stories people told after a couple of drinks were sometimes more interesting than anything he found in a library.

He didn't necessarily believe them.

But he remembered them.

By then, **The Mesilla Files** had become something of a private obsession.

There was no organization by that name. No research center. No staff.

Just Dylan and years of notes, questions and stories.

And underneath all of it was something he didn't particularly try to hide:

Dylan was a believer.

He didn't believe every story.

He certainly didn't believe every person telling one.

But he believed there was something behind the accumulated mysteries of Mesilla and the surrounding desert.

He wanted to know what it was.

BACK TO EL PASO

As Dylan entered his thirties, the pull of the Borderlands became stronger.

He returned to El Paso and enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso, once again focusing on history, particularly local and regional history.

And once again, he found himself behind a bar.

It was a place near the university.

That's where he met **Theodore Ray Mercer**.

At first, Mercer was simply another customer.

That changed when he discovered that his bartender knew an unusual amount about the history and folklore of Mesilla.

Mercer started coming back.

Frequently.

Their conversations became longer.

Mercer told stories about people Dylan had read about. He mentioned old incidents Dylan knew only from obscure accounts. Occasionally he introduced names and events Dylan had never encountered.

Some of Mercer's stories were believable.

Some were questionable.

And some, Dylan suspected, were complete nonsense—or at least greatly improved by Mercer's storytelling.

That didn't matter much.

Dylan enjoyed the conversations.

Apparently Mercer did too.

For almost a year, the older man sat at the bar and talked while Dylan poured drinks and listened.

Then one evening Mercer changed the conversation.

AN ABSURD PROPOSITION

Mercer told Dylan that he had a wealthy friend in Denver.

The friend wanted to fund a research organization in Mesilla devoted to investigating the history of the region.

Not simply the accepted history.

All of it.

Documents.

Stories.

Legends.

Unexplained events.

The things historians could establish and the things they couldn't.

Mercer wanted Dylan to run it.

There would be a good salary.

More surprisingly, there would be what Mercer described as a **substantial amount of money** available to establish and operate the research center.

Dylan had worked behind a bar long enough to recognize this type of conversation.

People sitting on barstools regularly owned businesses they didn't own, knew celebrities they had never met and were about to close deals that somehow never closed.

So Dylan treated Mercer's proposal accordingly.

He said yes.

Mostly for fun.

He assumed Mercer would disappear and the entire episode would eventually become another story Dylan could tell customers:

Did I ever tell you about the guy who offered me a research center while I was bartending in El Paso?

But there was another reason Dylan said yes.

It was his dream.

If there were such a place, he wanted to run it.

If somebody really was willing to finance an investigation into the mysteries he had spent much of his life studying, Dylan wanted to be the person conducting it.

The proposal was absurd.

But he wanted it to be true.

MERCER WASN'T JOKING

Over the next several weeks, something unexpected happened.

Mercer didn't disappear.

The funding existed.

The legal arrangements were real. The money arrived exactly as Mercer had promised.

Dylan dealt primarily with representatives handling the financial and organizational details. There were attorneys, accountants, documents to sign, budgets to approve and arrangements to make.

At the time, Dylan had little reason to question any of it.

He was far too busy building the research center he had dreamed about for years.

The schedule moved remarkably fast.

An office was established.

Storage space was acquired.

Equipment was purchased.

Dylan recruited two respected researchers and analysts, both with previous connections to New Mexico State University.

And the **TRC Research Center** was born.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Dylan had the resources to do what he had always wanted to do.

Research Mesilla without deciding in advance what he was supposed to find.

Follow the evidence.

Investigate the stories.

Separate history from folklore where possible.

And when that wasn't possible, admit it.

Looking back, however, there was one question Dylan probably should have asked more often.

A very simple question.

Who was actually paying for all of this?

THEN THE BOXES ARRIVED

Dylan expected the first few months to be spent building the organization.

He was wrong.

Almost before TRC was ready, the **TOX archive** was turned over to them.

Boxes began arriving.

Documents.

Letters.

Maps.

Photographs.

Audio recordings.

Film.

Video.

Research notes.

Material connected to people and events Dylan had been studying for years.

And there was far more of it than anyone expected.

The newly created research center went almost instantly from trying to find material to being overwhelmed by it.

Some of the names were immediately familiar.

Sheriff Tomas Ortega.

Father Miguel Serrano.

Lawrence Jackson.

Captain Voss.

Others weren't.

And the deeper TRC went into the material, the stranger some of the connections became.

The Mesilla Files were no longer simply stories Dylan had collected.

They were sitting in boxes around him.

THE DREAM BECOMES AN INVESTIGATION

Dylan is still a believer.

That hasn't changed.

But running TRC has forced him to become something else as well.

Careful.

A story isn't evidence simply because he wants it to be true.

A photograph isn't proof because it raises an uncomfortable question.

Two events occurring in the same place aren't necessarily connected.

And sometimes the most important words a researcher can say are:

We don't know.

That's increasingly what TRC has become.

Not an organization created to prove that the legends of Mesilla are true.

An organization created to find out **whether any of them are.**

And now, after months of chasing new leads, Dylan has made another change.

TRC is turning its attention back toward the enormous quantity of material already in its possession.

New researchers have been brought in.

Boxes that received only a cursory examination are being reopened.

Old film is being digitized.

Documents are being cross-referenced.

Photographs are being examined again.

Because Dylan has begun to suspect something.

Perhaps TRC doesn't need another mystery.

Perhaps it already has more mysteries than it understands.

And perhaps somewhere inside those boxes is the answer to a question Dylan Carrillo has been asking since long before there was a TRC Research Center:

What really happened in Mesilla?

A bartender once listened to those stories because he enjoyed them.

Now he has the opportunity to investigate them.

The adventure Dylan dreamed about for most of his life has become real.

But somewhere behind that adventure is another question—one Dylan hasn't spent much time investigating yet.

Mercer told him that a wealthy friend from Denver wanted the research center created.

The money appeared.

TRC was built.

Then, almost immediately, the TOX archives appeared.

For now, Dylan considers those events separate.

Someday, he may have reason to reconsider that assumption.

Because perhaps one of the biggest mysteries surrounding the TRC Research Center isn't what it has discovered.

It may be **why someone wanted it created in the first place.**

THE MESILLA FILES

Follow the investigation. Examine the evidence. Decide what you believe.