

Fare Well to A Great Fare
by Abe Mittleman

Driving a taxi in New York City has always been noted as a business where you meet well-known people, celebrities of society. I've had several over the years. Here is the story of one I'll never forget.

It was a slow Sunday night on February 20, 1983. I was driving a Ford Fairmont, one of the worst cars ever to be a NYC taxi. I was in the process of letting out three passengers in front of the St. Moritz Hotel on Central Park South.

Suddenly the one and only "James Brown- The Godfather of Soul" appears and walks right in front of my taxi. I watched as he placed his hand on the door of a Checker taxi that was positioned next to mine. He was about to get into the Checker Taxi.

I shouted out "James Brown, James Brown How are you? It's great to see you." Mr. Brown turned to me and said "I think I'll get in your taxi." He then turned toward my taxi, opened the door and sat down in the back seat. He asked me to take him to W93rd street and Columbus Avenue. I made a quick U-turn and headed toward Central Park West.

I don't remember the entire conversation. But, I do remember that we talked all through the ride. What I do remember is that he said that any time anyone asks him who the greatest singer in the world is he always says "Mick Jagger" and any time anyone asks Mick Jagger the same question he always says "James Brown." I don't know if he was putting me on but he implied that he was under the impression that taxi drivers made several hundred thousand dollars a year. I informed him that he definitely had that wrong. He also seemed worried that the economy was slumping and that it may affect his record sales. I remember telling him that I didn't think he had any thing to worry about. I said to him "James, if people have one dollar to buy one record it would be his that they bought"

We proceeded up Central Park West to W93rd street. I turned and drove to Columbus Avenue. When we reached the corner he asked me if I could do him a favor. I said "you name it." He told me that if he got out of the car there would be a mob of people there in no time. He said "It's worse than Elvis Presley." So he wanted me to go into the building on W93rd street and go up to the 20th floor to call on a lady friend of his and to tell her he was waiting for her. I agreed.

I left James Brown in my taxi with the doors locked and the engine running. I locked myself out of my own taxi. I had never before done something like this. I have never done anything like that since. I told him that if he needed to take the taxi to escape it would be ok. I said I would catch up to him later at his hotel. In hindsight, that may not have been a wise thing to do. But, I was much younger then, I don't think I would ever do anything like that now.

Upon entering the building I had to go past a security guard. So, I had no choice than to inform him what I was up to. I went to the 20th floor and rang the bell of the lady. There was no answer. So, I felt a little funny about having to go back and tell him that there wasn't an answer, but I did. He then asked me to go back and leave a note under the door. I did.

Upon exiting the building for a second time, two young men asked me if James Brown was in my taxi? I don't recall if I answered. But I do recall that I was worried he would be upset that I had let it be known he was there. So, I made a dash for the taxi. He opened the door for me and we took off. We headed back to the St. Moritz hotel.

When we arrived back at The St. Moritz Hotel on Central Park South the taxi meter was \$7.50. Keep in mind this was 1983. The fare would be much more in today's market. James handed me a \$20 bill and said "God Bless You." I then asked him if he would sign a blank trip card. He wrote "My Thanks to Abe from James Brown." I have kept that trip card in a safe place ever since. It is still in the same condition as the day he signed it.

On December 25, 2006, at approximately 2:30 a.m, I was driving home after working the night shift when I heard the news of James Browns passing. I was sad to hear this. I felt as if I lost a personal friend. Good Bye James Brown. Good Bye to a Great Fare!