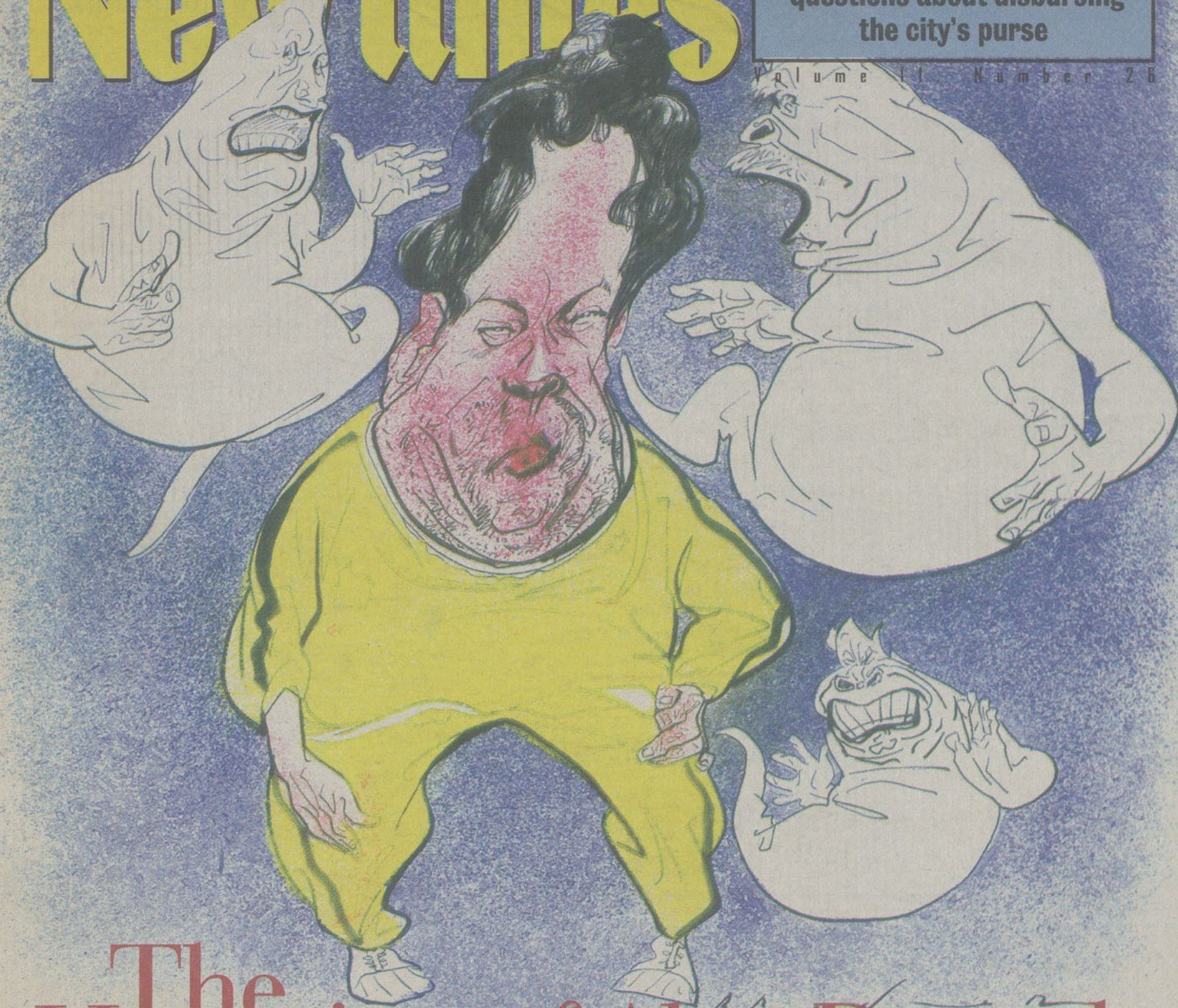


# New Times

October 10 - 16, 1996 FREE

**Metro: Odio faces more questions about disbursing the city's purse**

Volume 11 Number 26



## The Haunting of Alex Daoud

He has been out of prison for a year and a half, but will Miami Beach's disgraced ex-mayor ever be a free man? **By KIRK SEMPLE**

**Fidel writes screenplay (adapted by political foe)**



**You can't tell the Odios without a program! A New Times exclusive!**



**DeFede: The Heat's arena plan is just a bunch of pretty pictures**

**Political correctness alert: Here come the Queers!**



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of Circulations

On the cover:  
illustration by  
Steve Brodner





# The Haunt of Alex Daoud

HE DID TIME FOR CORRUPTION. HE MADE DELIVERIES FOR A FLORIST.  
HE SPEWED OUT PAGE AFTER PAGE OF AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PROSE.  
AND ALL THE WHILE  
HIS SORDID PAST HAS PLAGUED HIM LIKE A LOUSY CASE OF HEARTBURN.



# ing



## By Kirk Semple

When he entered prison in the fall of 1993, Alex Daoud, the fallen prodigy of Dade County politics, carried with him a large, dark suitcase. His nephew, who had chauffeured Daoud to the gates of the federal penitentiary in Estill, South Carolina, recorded the moment in a series of snapshots. The first shows the erstwhile mayor of Miami Beach standing in a parking lot, the prison's cinderblock administration building in the background. Having just driven up from Miami via Hilton Head Island, Daoud is

dressed in an outfit appropriate for an autumn outing: khaki pants and a striped button-down shirt. A pair of sunglasses hangs from his neck. He stands straight, his heavy arms hanging at his sides, his stomach bulging against a worn leather belt. Squinting into the sun, his puffy, boyish face shows resolve and, in the slightest upturn at the corners of his eyes and mouth, pluck.

Minutes earlier the 50-year-old Daoud had called me at *New Times* via a mobile speaker phone to broadcast his arrival in Estill. In his

twelve years as an elected official, he was famously vain, insatiable for media attention. Even at this most ignominious of moments, Daoud, ever the self-publicist, needed to document the event — in both word and image.

In the second picture he has picked up his suitcase and is trudging toward the administration building, his body straining away from the luggage, which is heavy with workout clothes and court documents and the beginnings of the autobiography he'd started to write.

In the final photo the man and his suitcase have receded into the middle distance and into the shadowed portal.

Daoud had been sentenced to a prison term of five years and two months for bribery and other crimes. His conviction heralded the end of a remarkable political career that once seemed to hold limitless potential. Born in Miami Beach, Daoud entered Miami Beach government in 1979 soon after his graduation from a small

**Continued on page 23**



“In exchange for citizens taking their bank accounts to Holtz, I’d support them. I was never a pressure kind of guy. I was a romancer.”



## Daoud

Continued from page 21

Illinois law school by beating the entrenched incumbent in a city commission race. He was the hometown boy: Six foot four and good-looking, inexhaustibly charming and exuberant, he waded easily through the multiethnic soup of Miami Beach; although Lebanese Catholic by descent, he breached the traditional Jewish dominance of the city’s elected leadership. He won three consecutive elections to the commission, followed by an unprecedented three consecutive mayoral terms. As Miami Beach’s number-one cheerleader and deal-maker, he presided over the city’s transformation from sleepy retirement village to international playground for the beautiful, monied, and decadent. He was unbeatable.

Until he beat himself.

In 1990 federal investigators began to uncover evidence that the mayor had sold the public trust for private gain. The following year he was indicted on 41 charges, among them racketeering, bribery, extortion, tax evasion, and money laundering. Prosecutors accused him of shaking down law firms, bankers, developers, contractors, and unions in return for favorable votes on matters before the commission.

He was convicted on one count of bribery for taking \$10,000 from boxing promoter and drug dealer Gilberto “Willy” Martínez. Prosecutors said Daoud, in the role of mayor, had lobbied developer Donald Trump to grant Martínez the closed-circuit television rights to a boxing match in Atlantic City. Rather than face a second trial on 24 unresolved corruption charges and 6 tax charges, he pleaded guilty to another count of bribery (for accepting \$5000 from a CenTrust Bank subsidiary in return for a favorable vote on a zoning variance for CenTrust chairman David Paul), as well as to one count each of money laundering, tax fraud, and obstruction of justice. He was sentenced in September 1993. By that time he had lost everything: His wife had divorced him, the Florida bar had disbarred him, and he was forced to sell his plush home on Sunset Island to cover legal fees.

As his incarceration approached, Daoud said he was a changed man. The grueling ordeal of the federal trial had exposed the moral and ethical vacuum of his soul and the phoniness of his life. His greatest realization, he said, was how few real friends — as opposed to *political* friends — he had. “The amazing thing is that no one cared,” the fallen mayor told me in agreeing to be profiled in *New Times* that fall. (Daoud’s plummet was the subject of a September 29, 1993, cover story, “Daoud Descending”; his preincarceration live feed from Estill was documented in “Bye Bye Birdy,” a short piece published later that year.) He lambasted most of the people he once considered his close advisers and confidants, most notably former Capital Bank chairman Abel Holtz and former CenTrust Bank chairman David Paul. Like a moth to a light bulb, these were luminaries to whom Daoud had flown. They were rich or influential — preferably both — and he solicited their counsel and attention. But, said Daoud ruefully, they all abandoned him when he fell.

During the final months of his freedom,

photos courtesy Alex Daoud



Daoud, above with banker Abel Holtz and U.S. Sen. Bob Graham and below with his mother and actor Don Johnson, yearned to be rich and powerful



Daoud took an opportunity that he felt would allow him to recapture some of his dignity and provide some moral redemption, not to mention reduce his sentence: He became a witness for the federal government. He testified on behalf of the feds during the bank-fraud trial of Paul, who had been indicted on several dozen charges, including the accusation that he bribed Daoud with CenTrust funds. During his testimony at the trial, Daoud admitted he had been cooperating in a federal investigation of Holtz and claimed he had received bribes from Capital Bank as well.

With that, he said, he was ready to move

on with his life, put his past behind him. After prison he hoped to leave the country with his young son and realize his dream of going to medical school.

At the prison gates, security guards stripped him of his suitcase and most of its contents. But he still went in with plenty of baggage: hatred, bitterness, and a corrosive sense of betrayal. The same people who defined him when he was at the top were continuing to define him now that he’d hit bottom.

In the Federal Correctional Institute in Estill, Daoud is confined to a minimum-security wing. He quickly adopts a routine. He rises early, eats breakfast, makes his bed, and tidies the surrounding area in the communal barracks. Then he goes to his job — teaching high school equivalency courses and Spanish to fellow inmates. He works until three o’clock, with a break for lunch, and finishes the afternoon with some exercise, perhaps a little power walk on the prison track or a weight-lifting session. Evenings he spends working on his book in the prison library, pounding out the sentences on a manual typewriter.

But Daoud doesn’t rest easy with himself. He calls me within a few months of changing into prison-issue blues, his anxieties

pouring through the phone line. In a hushed voice and speaking quickly over the communal telephone, he says his ex-wife has asked a judge to suspend his visitation rights with their son. He tells me I should investigate, urges me to call the federal prosecutors he’d assisted in their inquiries about financiers Holtz and Paul. “Ask them why they are not helping me to keep my son after I helped the U.S. government,” he demands.

There’s more on his mind. Specifically, Holtz. It’s time that people learn the truth about the banker, he declares, then begins to describe their relationship. They met in the early Eighties and became friends. Holtz was Daoud’s best man at his wedding; Daoud even gave his son the middle name Abel. “Whenever Abel would call, Alex would go,” remembers Bonnie Levin, a lawyer with whom Daoud had a long-running love affair while he held political office. “Alex adored Abel Holtz. Whatever he could do for Abel, he would do.” Holtz introduced Daoud to other movers and shakers around town, advised him about city business, and even urged him to accept the payment from David Paul, the ex-mayor claims.

The relationship turned sour when Daoud came under investigative scrutiny. Daoud says Holtz distanced himself from the indicted politician and didn’t offer any support — financial or otherwise — during those trying years. Eventually Daoud changed his son’s middle name.

At David Paul’s trial in October 1993, Daoud testified that he had spent nearly seven years on the payroll of Capital Bank

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# News of Holtz's plea provokes a call from MCC. "He had all the money but he didn't have the belly!" Daoud hoots.

## Daoud

Continued from page 23

and a subsidiary, ostensibly to provide legal counsel. During that time, he said under oath, he did no "legitimate" work. He said the payments were in exchange for favorable votes and other political favors, but didn't elaborate. (A federal grand jury began scrutinizing Holtz in 1992, looking into everything from the banker's business affairs to an allegation that he had misused bank funds to settle two sexual harassment complaints against him. Daoud's cooperation had expanded the scope of the inquiry.)

Now Daoud is divulging more details about the ongoing investigation. "I've heard that Holtz has brought up every big gun to kill this indictment," he whispers conspiratorially, mentioning former Assistant U.S. Attorney Jane Moscovitz as well as the high-powered Washington, D.C., law firm Williams & Connolly. "Holtz has spent a fortune to kill the indictment," he hisses. Daoud doesn't ever come out and say it, but the reason for his outrage is obvious: He doesn't want to see Holtz, a multimillionaire, buy his way out of an investigation. It's money Daoud never saw during his trial and thinks he deserved, at least as a token of friendship.

The next few months bring more calls from Daoud, but sporadically, often patched through his nephew A.J.'s funeral parlor in Miami Beach. Holtz is a perennial topic. "Every Saturday we used to meet," Daoud recalls during one conversation. "Holtz always had his own agenda for the meetings. I would go to his house, we'd play tennis." At the time, Capital was competing for influence on the Beach against Jefferson National Bank, he says. "We talked about putting me on a retainer and how he wanted to do business with the city."

Holtz started him on a \$1000-per-week retainer in December 1983, Daoud says, several days before the Miami Beach City Commission voted to put Holtz's 24-year-old son Daniel on the powerful Zoning Board of

Adjustment. During the commission meeting, he asserts, Abel Holtz used the phone in the media booth at the rear of the chambers to call him at the dais "to tell me how to vote." Daoud later voted Holtz's other son, Javier, onto the Visitors Convention Authority.

Daoud says the principal "work" he did for Holtz was to make referrals to Capital Bank. "People used to come to my office wanting to do business with the city. I'd say they would have to take their bank accounts to Holtz," he explains. "I'd say, 'There's a guy you should know. He'll help you with the commissioners.' In exchange for citizens taking their bank accounts to Holtz, I'd support them." He employed a soft-sell technique. "I was never a pressure kind of guy," he notes. "I was a romancer."

During the calls from Estill, Daoud insists he can't be quoted in any story that might get published about these alleged illegalities. But he lists people and organizations he says he steered toward Capital Bank, including Gold Coast Cablevision, Penrod's Beach Club, St. Patrick's Church, the Miami Beach Housing Authority, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 349, Plumbers Local Union No. 519, and Laborers International Union of North America Local Union 800. "Call them," he implores. "Ask them if Alex Daoud ever put pressure on you to put funds in Capital Bank."

Of those officials who return calls or are willing to comment, only Jack Penrod of Penrod's Beach Club says he did business with Capital Bank as a result of an introduction from Daoud. "Daoud was mayor of the city and enticed me to come down here," he recalls. "I was looking for a bank and Alex introduced me to Capital Bank, introduced me to Abel Holtz." Penrod took out a \$500,000 beach-equipment loan that he paid off years ago, he says. But the business owner insists there was nothing illegal about the hookup. "Alex Daoud never did



Abel Holtz was sentenced while surrounded by weeping well-wishers; Daoud, pictured here on the way to his sentencing in 1993, suffered alone

anything wrong here. His introduction to Capital Bank was nothing more than a friend helping a friend. No one ever put any pressure on me to do anything extraordinary."

A representative from the electrical workers union doesn't recall ever speaking with Daoud about Capital Bank; Father James Murphy from St. Patrick's Church says Daoud introduced him to Holtz but that he didn't move the church's account to Capital; the others can't be reached for comment or refuse to respond to Daoud's allegations.

(Later, when I ask Holtz about Daoud's claims, he will refute them, maintaining that Daoud did in fact perform legitimate legal work to earn his Capital Bank retainer; that he didn't urge Daoud to accept the controversial CenTrust retainer; that it was Daoud's suggestion, not his, that Daniel Holtz run for the Zoning Board; that while he was, indeed, present in the commission chambers at the time of the board vote, he

didn't phone Daoud to instruct him in any way; and that he never considered Daoud as a friend.)

Daoud's calls, though infrequent, are often desperate and lonely, and always rambling. "The mayor's up here rotting to death while you're having a good time," he exclaims at one point, impatient with my lack of success in confirming his allegations about the Capital Bank payments. "Utz this thing a little bit! Ask them: Is it true that Daoud tried to get you to move your money? You gotta utz them! Get in the game! You're on the bench! Get in the game!"

More than once he brings up his mother's death from arteriosclerosis at age 83, shortly before his federal trial. "Ya know," he says. "Holtz didn't even have the decency to call me when my mother died." Then: "My book's coming along. It's really good." Pause. "I can barely walk," he adds,

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photo courtesy Alex Daoud

DATE: JUNE 10TH, 1994

TO: WARDEN RICHARD ELL PATRICK

FROM: ALEX DAUD

SUBJECT: I have completely lost touch with the problem in which you desire assistance, and what you think should be done. (One detail: I was a pleasure seeing you in the dining hall today during our food meal. There were several people around you discussing various catering matters, in which it didn't seem appropriate timing to speak with me concerning a very serious sanitation problem that exists in our dining facility. It is the unsavory condition of flies, mosquitos and other assorted sundry flying insects that have infested our place of eating. Interestingly enough, the same situation occurred in my previous institution I had interned at (Estill, South Carolina). I was overcome by the present infestation of electric bug lights and various fly and pest traps, which subsequently led to the death of briefly, desolation and the Board of Health. I am again for acknowledging me during our encounter this afternoon and for your

APPROPOS TIMING TO SPEAK WITH YOU CONCERNING A VERY SERIOUS SANITATION PROBLEM THAT EXISTS IN OUR DINING FACILITY. IT IS THE UNSAVORY CONDITION OF FLIES, MOSQUITOS AND OTHER ASSORTED SUNDRY FLYING INSECTS THAT HAVE INFESTED OUR PLACE OF EATING. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, THE SAME



Daoud takes a break from scrubbing latrines at the Metropolitan Correctional Center

Even in prison, Daoud used his famous charm to schmooze his way into the hearts of others; here he raises a bothersome issue with the warden

grumbling about the toll his body took under the stress of his trial. "The feds haven't even called to see how I am. That's the truth about helping the federal government." He's angry that they haven't acted on his request to be moved to the Metropolitan Correctional Center (MCC) in South Dade; he wants to be closer to his son and to fight his ex-wife's motion to suspend his visitation rights. "They could move me down so easily it's unbelievable," he complains.

He also wants news of other heavy hitters whose fortunes are in flux. "What's happening with Jim Dougherty?" he wonders, referring to Miami Beach lawyer James Dougherty II, who is the subject of a federal probe into allegations that he ripped off the Lloyd's of London insurance syndicate. "What about [Hialeah Mayor] Raul Martinez? Is the government going to try him again?"

Inevitably the conversation veers back to Holtz. During one chat he drops a startling

revelation that he has shared with federal authorities: A rabbi from Miami Beach had paid him a visit and delivered a private sermon on the betrayal of the Israelites during the time of the Egyptian pharaohs. The message was unmistakable: "He basically told me not to implicate Holtz," concludes Daoud, who won't reveal the rabbi's identity. "While he never said he'd been sent by Holtz, it was clear. He indicated I'd be able to run for mayor again, I'd be able to practice law again, there would be a job for me at Capital Bank."

Far from eroding Daoud's anti-Holtz resolve, the emissary's visit only jacks up his perception of the cloak-and-dagger quotient of the feud. "There's no doubt Holtz will try to retaliate against me," he asserts cryptically during a conversation in the spring of 1994, several months into his sentence. (There is some precedent for paranoia: Federal officials had been so concerned about Daoud's safety after he testified at the David Paul trial that

they secreted him in a Howard Johnson in Deerfield Beach, where he remained under federal protection for three weeks until he made the drive to Estill.) "Those are bad guys," he says in reference to Holtz and his allies, before plunging into self-pity. "My life's been ruined now, ya know it? It's over now. Nobody's lining up." He pauses. "The most amazing thing is how many people are surrounding *him* and nobody was by *me*."

He goes silent, then murmurs, "I don't think I'm going to live much longer."

Daoud remains at Estill until the late spring of 1994, when the Federal Bureau of Prisons and the U.S. Marshal's Service begin pinballing him around the country. Before each leg of his journey, he is strip-searched, then shackled in ankle and wrist chains. After a three-day layover in a Tallahassee prison, he makes a

brief stop at MCC so he can appear at a custody hearing and speak to the federal grand jury that's investigating Holtz. He spends a week in solitary confinement ("For my protection," he explains). Next he's flown out to El Reno, Oklahoma, where he spends three more weeks in solitary confinement — further protection against possible violent repercussions as a result of his cooperation with the feds, he says — then on to Florence, Colorado, for a month and a half.

During his western swing, Daoud holds a variety of jobs — janitorial duty, moving soil on a landscaping detail, heavy labor in a food warehouse. His favorite is working as a librarian in the Florence penitentiary. But when he's not in the low-security camps, he rubs shoulders with murderers, rapists, and drug dealers serving life sentences.

"I spent the night in Arizona on a mattress with a guy who had the word *psycho* tattooed on the back of his head," he'll recall in a later conversation. He witnesses a stabbing and stumbles across a suicide: a man who has hanged himself with a bed sheet. Brawls are frequent, and so fierce that inmates sometimes have to clean up the blood with mops.

He avoids the violence by keeping to himself and being friendly. "I was constantly helping people," he'll say later. "I helped some of them write letters home, study for the GED, prepare legal briefs. It was like when I was mayor!" It also helps that he is a big guy: "Sometimes I put up with some mental abuse — people calling me snitch. I'd say, 'You're right! I'm a snitch! Whadda ya wanna do about it? Don't just open your mouth! Whadda ya wanna do about it?'" At one time a fervent recreational boxer, Daoud never gets into fights in prison.

By fall he has returned to MCC via Salt Lake City, Sacramento and Lompock, California, Portland, and Phoenix. Soon thereafter, 59-year-old Abel Holtz steps down as chairman and CEO of Capital Bank, putting an end to months of rumor and speculation. He passes the reins of the operation to his eldest son Daniel, who is 35 years old. On October 25, Holtz — one of the most powerful men in South Florida banking, a towering pillar of the community for whom a downtown Miami street, a Miami Beach tennis stadium, a university quadrangle, and a hospital waiting room are named — pleads guilty to obstructing the federal grand jury's 1991 investigation of Alex Daoud.

Continued on page 26

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## Daoud

Continued from page 25

Holtz admits to having provided misleading material about the purpose of Capital Bank's payments to Daoud. Specifically, he had "denied any financial relationship with Daoud other than one of lawyer and client on matters of contracts involving Capital Bank and [a subsidiary]," according to case documents. "He also obstructed the grand jury's investigation by giving vague and misleading answers to questions regarding, among other things, the circumstances of the coincidences between the payments to Daoud and the appointments by the City Commission of family members and himself to various boards and commissions in the city."

News of Holtz's plea provokes a call from MCC. "He had all the money but he didn't have the belly!" Daoud hoots. "He didn't have the balls to fight it!" His laugh is deep and coarse and malevolent. "Ohhhh, a convict!" he cries mockingly. "Ohhhhhh!" Then he barks, "And he was surrounded by Latins! Unfortunately, I was surrounded by traitors."

Once well-groomed and swarthy, Daoud has let his hair grow in prison; the curls tumble over the collar of his blue prison uniform. It's January 1995, and in the thirteen months he's been locked up, he's lost weight; his arms, though still thick, have lost the definition he once sculpted and treasured.

"I'm an orderly — I clean toilets," he reports when I arrive for a chat. "I wash floors, clean windows. I also buff floors and wash carpets. I've become *quite* the house cleaner." We sit on a couch in the camp

photo courtesy Alex Daoud



In his testimonial at Daoud's sentence-reduction hearing, former Miami mayor Xavier Suarez recalled a 1986 charity boxing match with his Beach counterpart

administrator's office. The fluorescent lighting bounces acutely off the white cinder-block walls.

"Ya know, it's taken me a year to realize how much I was betrayed. It's really changed me, it *really* has," he says. "From the bottom of my soul, *really* transformed me. Being down really changes your perspective." Pause. His face falls dramatically. "Isn't it amazing how quickly they forget?"

A corrections guard walks into the room, presumably to check on his charge. "Hey,

Barry!" Daoud calls out, bounding up from the sofa. "Let me introduce you to a friend."

Perfunctory handshake completed, the guard moves on and Daoud slowly lowers himself back onto the couch. He says his knees and back hurt; he looks as stiff as a man ten years older. (Daoud overcame polio as a child and has ever since been obsessed with his bodily well-being — or lack thereof.) He quickly reverts to his favorite topic: "In a lot of ways I was set up by Holtz. Why did I get in bed with Paul?

'Cause of Holtz. And I was the bad guy." Two inmates pass and Daoud loudly hails them: "Hey, Frank! Hey, Jesús!"

He pulls out a sheaf of papers — his autobiography-in-progress — and begins to read out loud. It's the early Eighties, he's a commissioner, and he's riding along on patrol with his nephew A.J., a Beach police officer at the time: "We drove up Collins Avenue with its empty, deserted stores," he reads dramatically. "We passed by the Miami Beach Convention Center with its beehemoth buildings and darkened, lifeless entrance way. There were no cars, no tourists, no pedestrians walking the streets of Miami Beach. Just a lifeless expanse of lonely, abandoned concrete sidewalks. The strangeness was amplified by the yellowish glare of the phosphorous streetlights."

He suddenly stops. "Think it will sell?" he asks eagerly. "Lemme tell you: This book is *really* good. I want to tell what it was *like*. I think a couple of people are going to have to get a tracheotomy when they read it."

Daoud's book will expose the underbelly of the Beach during his watch, he says: the smoky back rooms, the corrupt cops, the wanton lying and cheating and thievery among public officials. Nor will he be shy about revealing the salacious details of his personal life: his relentless partying, his unquenchable sex drive, his serial infidelities. "I used to screw in the mayor's office!" he brags. "I thought I had to get close to the people so I did it by screwing them in the mayor's office." He explodes in laughter.

He begins to reminisce about his appearance on the stand at David Paul's trial. "I was good that day, wasn't I?" he asks. Then he hopscotches to the subject of a possible story about Holtz. "Is *New Times* going to write a story about him? I want

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# "I made a shambles of myself and all I can say is, I'm sorry, Your Honor, and I'm sorry to the citizens of Miami Beach."

you to go in and ask some —" he pauses — "some *perspicacious* questions," he finishes, slowly unfolding a new vocabulary word. "What could it be called?" he asks, his eyes opening boyishly wide. "The Untold Story? No, that's not catchy enough. 'Holtz Descending?'" he ventures, a reference to the title of his own 1993 profile in *New Times*.

"You know, I lost part of my soul at that place." He's talking about the federal courthouse where he was tried. "Did Holtz come to my trial? Did he call me after my mother died? Piece of shit!"

At the end of the interview, Daoud heads back into the prison grounds to go about his chores. Outside the camp, a corrections officer stops for a moment to gossip about the inmate. "He was mayor of Miami Beach, I hear," the officer remarks. "You think he'll be mayor when he gets out, like that guy in Washington?"

On January 15, 1995, five days before Abel Holtz's sentencing, the *Miami Herald* publishes a pleasant story about a black man who worked his way up from being a security guard of a Liberty City bank to being a vice president of Capital Bank.

Before the morning is over, Daoud calls

from MCC. "Did you see that puff piece on Holtz?" He is enraged. "What color is the judge who's sentencing him?" U.S. District Judge Donald Graham is black. "I can't stand that paper! Look at the way they treated me! Then look at the way they treated Paul and Holtz!" There's bile in his voice. "I smell a real stink. I mean a *real, real stink*." He has stopped yelling but his voice is cutting. "A puff piece *right before* his sentencing on Martin Luther King Day. I don't think he'll get time. What is this? A public relations ploy? You know how they used nuclear bombs on me? Look what they used on him! Fuck 'em! I don't give a fuck what people think about me — I'm not mayor any more! I'm not a public figure any more! Tell 'em to go scratch!"

Indeed, Holtz and his attorneys pull out all the stops for his sentencing, inviting an army of people to speak on his behalf. The front line is a tritone triumvirate composed of developers Armando Codina and Otis Pitts, Jr., as well as former U.S. senator Richard Stone. The courtroom at the Federal Justice Building in downtown Miami is packed with Holtz family members and supporters, including the family rabbi. It's standing room only.

Throughout the testimony, waves of muted sobbing wash over the room; the

gallery is a cotton field of tear-soaked handkerchiefs. The judge hands down a sentence of one and a half months in prison, four and a half months in home confinement, 3000 hours of community service, and a \$20,000 fine.

Daoud calls again the next day. He has seen the morning's *Herald* piece about the sentencing and wants details. "Did he take it the way I took it?" he asks eagerly. "Did he cry?" Unlike Daoud at his own sentencing, Holtz appeared to shed a tear. "So, his family was crying?" Daoud is perky. "Javier? Daniel? Bastard!" he growls suddenly. "Holtz said the pressure's been hard? Heh-heh-heh. Piece of shit! He was the mastermind here! But he got a month and a half? A fucking *month and a half*? His children were crying? Were any other politicians there? Was [U.S. Rep.] Ileana Ros-Lehtinen there?" He wants to know if his name was mentioned.

"If Holtz had jumped in and helped me, I probably wouldn't have gone through with this," he says. "How many people did I have talk for me when I went?" No one spoke on Daoud's behalf at his sentencing except for his attorney, Bruce Rogow. "Why? 'Cause I didn't ask anybody! I didn't call anybody up! What a piece of shit, man. They ought to stick his old fat ass behind the wire. Oh, the

bastard! Ball-less cocksucker! I hope they make a bitch out of him wherever he goes."

Daoud takes a breath and shudders audibly. "My God," he gasps. "The führer goes free and the soldiers suffer. This is *mein kampf*, my struggle."

Two days later Daoud calls to ask about Luciano Pavarotti's performance on the sands of South Beach the night before. "How was Pavarotti?" he asks cheerily. "Did [Mayor Seymour] Gelber give him a key to the city? I would've given him a key, you know it?" There's noise in the background, the sound of inmates. Daoud suddenly breaks into operatic song:

*O sole mio,  
Abel's going to jail.  
He'll not be happy,  
But he won't fail.*

*O sole mio,  
It's sad to see.  
A billionaire pulled,  
Solely by me.*

Pause. "Oh, what happened to me?" he asks rhetorically, his voice soft. Then he provides his own answer: "Avarice, my boy, avarice." He goes silent for a moment. "Why did the *Herald* put it there?" He's asking about the location of the day-after

**Continued on page 29**

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"I'm very happy. I'm happy to the extent that I'm free. I think I'm going to have a great life. Better than before, ya know it?"



## Daoud

Continued from page 27

story regarding Holtz's sentencing; it was on the front of the "Business" section. "They had a belly dancer's picture on the front page," he mutters. "Why didn't they put Holtz on the front page crying?"

On April 12, 1995, a year and a half after he entered prison, Daoud stands before the judge who sentenced him, promises he's been a good boy, and asks to be let out. Prosecutors have filed a request to cut short the five-year sentence on the basis of the convict's cooperation with federal investigators. Several members of the media are in the gallery, as are a few other observers, including at least one of Holtz's attorneys.

Three assistant U.S. attorneys vouch for Daoud's rehabilitation and invaluable assistance. One, Frank Sherman, mentions that Daoud went so far as to wear a wire and allow his phone to be tapped in order to record conversations with "various people." (Holtz was the primary target of those taps.) Declares fellow prosecutor Bruce Udolf: "While Daoud's crimes were substantial, so has been his cooperation. Alex Daoud has gone a long way toward setting right his wrongs." A haggard Daoud looks at the floor while Udolf speaks. "The process was at times intimidating for him and humiliating, as well," Udolf goes on. "But he fulfilled his end of the bargain."

Former Miami Mayor Xavier Suarez appears on Daoud's behalf. He reminisces about the two participating in a charity boxing match and a basketball game. "He lit up the city," Suarez recalls. "He had zest for making people feel good about being in Miami Beach. It is my impression that Mr. Daoud has had a great maturation process." As Suarez returns to his seat in the gallery, the two former mayors awkwardly embrace.

Then comes Daoud's turn. He is contrite and obsequious, not to mention uncharacteristically calm. "It's been over nineteen months since I stood in front of you, and it's really given me a chance to review my life," he confides to Judge James Lawrence King. "It gave me an opportunity to realize how wrong I was, how much I had. I had the whole world and I lost it. I went to trial for all the wrong reasons. I went to trial because I didn't want to believe the indictment against me. I went to trial to try to fool myself. I realized how much I had fallen. I made a shambles of myself and all I can say is, I'm sorry, Your Honor, and I'm sorry to the citizens of Miami Beach."

King grants the motion, ordering that Daoud be released by the following Sunday, which happens to be Easter.

"Outrageous!" Holtz attorney Jane Moscovitz growls under her breath, and then she darts out of the courtroom.

The next morning Daoud is given some clothes and \$26 and let out of MCC. He squeezes into the back seat of a Camaro piloted by the secretary of his old friend and business partner Russell Galbut, ducks down to conceal himself from the television crews gathered out front, and

speeds off into the South Dade countryside.

He phones the next night. "It was a great show, wasn't it?" he asks, referring to the sentence-reduction hearing. He's calling from an apartment at the Aventura Beach Club lent to him by Galbut, managing director of the condominium conversion firm Crescent Heights.

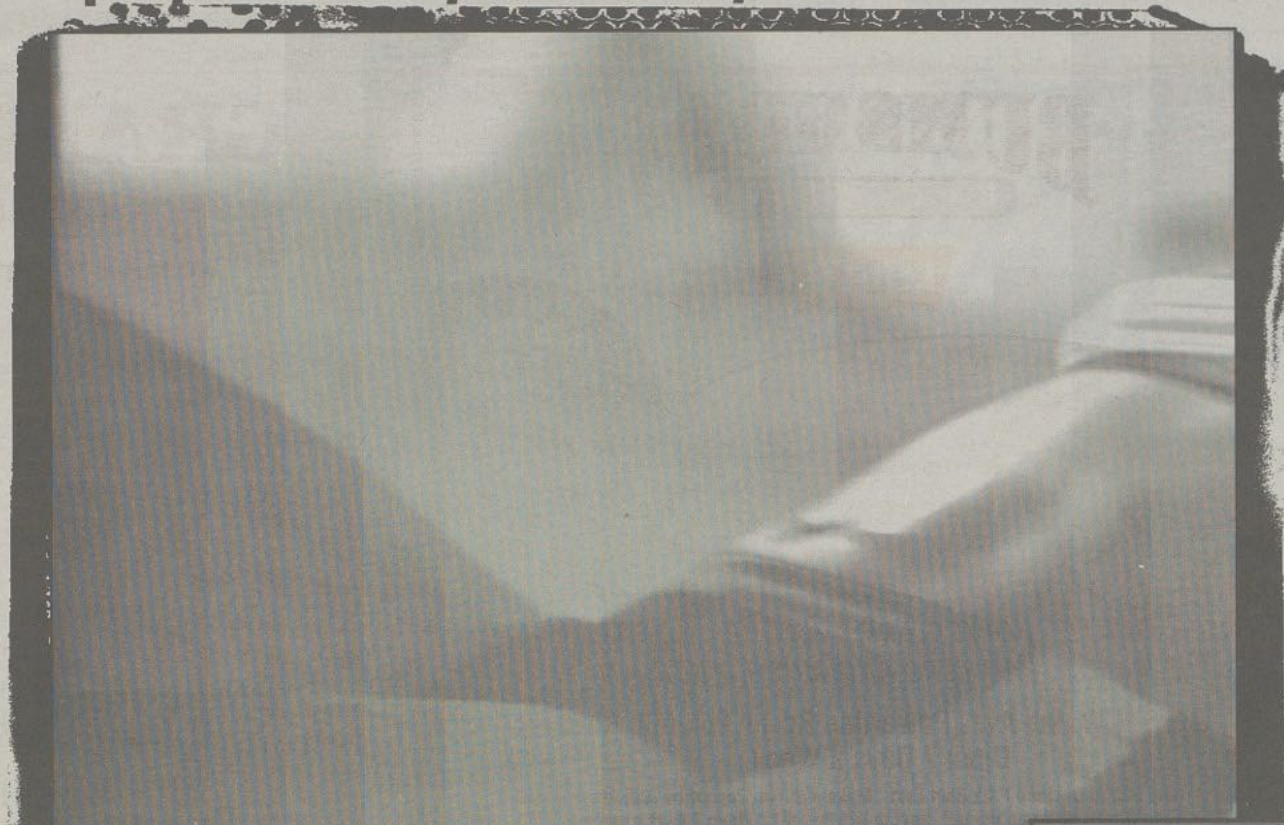
Daoud has been hiding out since his release, dodging reporters. He took his first walk on the beach in a year and a half, he dreamily divulges. But his mood quickly turns sour. "Did you see that story in the *Review*?" A column in the *Miami Daily Business Review* earlier in the week had referred to him as a "mendacious snitch."

"That's a cheap shot. *Mendacious snitch!*" he spits. "Why is everybody giving softballs to Holtz? Who's taken a real shot at the guy?"

He turns suddenly playful. "You think I can beat Gelber? What do you think? You don't think I could give him a run for his

Continued on page 31

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# He lands a job as office manager for a car alarm company and later begins making deliveries for a florist.

## Daoud Continued from page 29

money? Huh? Naw, those days are done for me. I kind of have no desire for the roar of the crowd. So, how did I look? Pale and everything?" he inquires. "A bestrag-gled look on my face?" he asks, oblivious to his verbal mis-step.

"It's brutal, man," he confides, shifting gears again. "There are no words that will tell you what it's like to be in prison."

Then it's back to politics. "It wouldn't be a good run against Gelber, would it? A Christian on a Jewish commission?"

"I really spoke all right? Really?"

"I'm free now. I can go and relax," he says, as if trying to convince himself. "I was walking the streets all by myself."

He recalls moments in the hearing, Suarez's testimony in particular. Then he bellows, "Nobody else could have done Holtz! Nobody!"

A few days later he calls again with an offering from his book and reads aloud an excerpt from the first chapter. The action takes place in a room at the Howard Johnson on Alton Road at the entrance of the Julia Tuttle Causeway. Daoud is in the room along with four FBI agents who are fitting him with a body bug in preparation for a scheduled meeting with Abel Holtz at the Forge restaurant.

"The hotel room was cramped, filled with a king-size bed and a spattering of the standard, sterile hotel furniture," Daoud reads, his voice low and mysterious. "It seemed even smaller because there were four members of the federal government surrounding an oversized round table. They were studiously examining a set of building plans that showed the complete outline for where my meeting was to take place, the meeting where I was going to wear my first 'wire.'" He reads a few more paragraphs, then stops.

"I'm very happy," he offers, then amends that thought: "I'm happy to the extent that I'm free. I think I'm going to have a great life. Better than before, ya know it? You look at people from Court Broom: Shenberg, Sepe, Goodhart. Not one day in the joint. I think that's shocking, ya know it?" (As Daoud speaks, ex-judges Harvey Shenberg and David Goodhart are avoiding incarceration by appealing their convictions; their appeals will later be denied. Alphonso Sepe's trial ended with a hung jury and he was freed.)

"A born-again snitch," Daoud merrily erupts, then continues in the dispassionate voice of a narrator: "The ex-con. He was in the bucket, he was in the can." Silence,



Out of prison, Daoud takes a stroll in Oleta River State Recreation Area and tries to take his mind off the past

photo courtesy Alex Daoud

then: "Did I take him down? Huh? Did I? Did he deserve it?"

During his first year out of prison, Daoud lays low per the request of his lawyer, Bruce Rogow. (During the federal investigation and for a few months after his indictment, he was represented by Alan Weinstein; he then brought in Roy Black as his lead counsel. Since his conviction, he has been represented by Rogow.) This, of course, means no media interviews. Several early requests make their way to him: television, newspapers, even *Herald*

publisher David Lawrence. "He wants to speak to the kid. Everyone wants a piece of me," Daoud chortles a few weeks after his release. "Ya gotta pay me for an interview, Lawrence! I'm no longer public property!" A TV reporter calls A.J. Daoud looking for the ex-con. "A.J. said, 'The mayor's not talking. Forgive him, he's not speaking.'" Daoud laughs at the irony of this: In his earlier incarnation, there was never a microphone he didn't like. "Elvis," he intones, "has left the building."

He lands a job as office manager for a car alarm company in Miami and later in the year begins making deliveries for a florist. "I delivered to the *Herald* today," he reports one evening. "They didn't even know who I was. Ha!" He continues to wear his hair long, often pulled back in an unruly ponytail. He seems proud of its growth; he constantly compares its length to the long hair on other men.

He gets around town in his beat-up Cadillac. He takes aerobics classes at the Gridiron gym on Miami Beach, visits his nephew, and spends time with his son — "The joy of my life," he proclaims. But he's far from content. Conversations inevitably swing around to his old bêtes noires. "I'm happy I did these people," he says of Holtz and Paul. "I'm sad I didn't do more people." Then he's back at Holtz's sentencing. "There was weeping and crying? His family was crying? Was Holtz crying? How did he seem? Almost timorous? Almost obsequious? Recalcitrant? Definitely obsequious, right?" He juggles the words like medicine balls. "Why didn't they put Holtz's ass behind the wire? They shoulda put him where that asshole belonged."

He insists he's a much different guy these days, that he's matured beyond the political turmoil that consumed him before. "Life seems so different now, my friend. So much more philosophical. That's why I want no part of politics. I'm very low-key, aren't I? I'm seeing it much better now. I don't have friends. They could've cared less about me.

Continued on page 33

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## Daoud

Continued from page 31

The only reason they cared about me was because I was a winner and I was sitting up there and could vote on stuff. I could've thrown everybody under the bus. I should've given up everybody who did something illegal, you know it? All those thirteen years in politics, all those people who I thought were friends. Not a one, not a one."

He seems happiest working on — or at least talking about — his book. Every

I should've  
given up  
everybody  
who did  
something illegal,  
you know it?

evening, he says, he pecks away at the draft on a laptop computer. "I think the book's going to be a best seller," he confides with no trace of facetiousness. "A runaway best seller." His intention is still to complete his probation and fly off to Grenada to go to medical school, eventually settling in an underdeveloped country to provide medical care for free. "Would that be a romantic end? Would it?" He suggests it might make a great ending to a new *New Times* profile of him.

"I could see it right now," he offers. "This is how I would write it." His voice drops to narrator pitch: "There were just a few tourists and a smattering of Grenadians heading for the plane as I saw the ex-mayor, considerably thinner, with longer hair, walking toward the plane with his son Alexander. There was a smile of contentment that he never displayed during his political career — during his twelve-year, volatile political career. He turned back and smiled to me prior to boarding the plane and he waved his hand, and for one brief moment time rolled back and he looked like the old Daoud, the mayor, the politician, the attorney.

"But the life of a convict had, in reality, changed him, because there seemed to be a sense of veracity in his words when he said, 'Kirk, take care of yourself. And I hope you get a chance to come down and visit us some time.' With a big smile, he grabbed his son and began to board the plane for the journey outside the country, the journey to leave the United States, the chance to realize the one dream in his life that he had never accomplished.

"Alex Daoud, ex-mayor" — pause — "ex-politician, ex-lawyer, ex-convict, seemed to have found a contentment in his life that had never been there before."

Daoud stops. His voice returns to its normal earnest baritone. "Did you write down when I said I hope you'd come see me? How did you like that as an end? What are we going to call this one, huh? 'Daoud Developing'?"

This is the first installment of a two-part story. Next week: Daoud's present tangles even more palpably with his past as he becomes enmeshed in litigation involving his old cronies and comes clean about his career of political crime.

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