



# THEATRE HILL LIFE

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**CROATIAN BORN DR. DANIEL 'CHICAGO SLIM' IVANKOVICH IS A MEDICAL DOCTOR AND CHICAGO BLUES GUITARIST WITH THE CHICAGO BLUES ALL-STARS. HIS EFFORTS IN HELPING THE POOR WITH MEDICAL ASSISTANCE ARE REMARKABLE**

**C**hicago Slim performs around twice the caseload of the average orthopedic surgeon, and paid about half as much, as he performs many upon the non-insured. This passionate 7ft ex-basketball player, doctor, humanitarian and Bluesman has been featured on ABC, CBS, NBC and WGN, add to that NASW named him "Citizen of The Year" for Chicago and Illinois and he was Chicago Magazine's, 'Chicagoan of The Year'. As if that wasn't enough, in the 80's Ivankovich was a radio announcer, recording engineer and producer. America was built out of the diversity of its hard working immigrants, and the enslaved peoples of Africa. While the fittest and well educated prosper within the capitalist system, minorities and the poor fall between the cracks and fall victim of the lesser-known 'The American Nightmare'.

"America's Health Care System is neither healthy, caring nor a system" - Walter Cronkite.

"One quarter of Medicare beneficiaries have five or more chronic conditions, sees an average of 13 physicians each year, and fills 50 prescriptions per year" Clayton M Christenson.

## EARLY LIFE

Well both my parents are physicians; my Father was captain of the Yugoslavian crew team that competed in Rome Olympics in 1960, so he had the opportunity to travel a lot. He and my Mom planned to defect when I was about three. We first lived in Germany a little while, my Mom and I joined him there, then we came to Chicago in about 1967. When we arrived, there was a very significant wave of immigrants from Yugoslavia, from the Eastern Block. They were populating the Rust Belt, working in the steel factories between Pittsburgh and Chicago. There were also around the 60's many of the professionals came because there was a significant need for physicians, engineers and scientists.

## BLUES AWARENESS

I did not get involved with the Blues until I was a teenager and I got into the Blues very backwardly. The thing is for me I am seven feet tall, so I was an All-State and All-American Basketball player. The tournaments

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# CHICAGO BLUES ALL-STARS

## RED, HOT & BLUE

and the places we practiced took us into a lot of the areas that were on the South and West Side of Chicago. Because of the areas I played, I would usually be the only white player on the teams. When I was a teenager the drinking age was 18 in Chicago, it later became 21. After practice I would go out with my teammates, I would hear some loud guitar that hinted early Led Zeppelin to me blaring out of these bars. They'd all say, "Hey let's go inside, I'm saying, 'We're only 15/16', they'd say, 'Don't worry about it'. Therefore, I could go in Blues clubs South & West Side when I was 16 Yrs old. We would go there, hang out, and watch music and they would serve us. It was like a totally different universe compared to where I was living and growing up. At that time, I didn't know who these musicians were. We went into Theresa's, we went into the Checkerboard Lounge, and I had no idea who many of these musicians were.

A lot of places on the South Side were on 63rd St. under the El tracks. These places had typical 70's decoration with orange shag carpeting and glittery Mardi Gras decorations everywhere. It was a scene and soundtrack of a funky seedy underworld that ran in parallel and intertwined with the Chicago Blues Scene. I mean it was pimps; it was drug dealing... it was culture far different than any culture I knew. All I knew as a teenager was "Wow man this stuff sounds like the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin". What the hell did I know about the Blues when I was 15 Years old? Often times after practice, my buddies and I would walk two blocks over to this huge open-air market on Maxwell St. to buy gym shoes and athletic gear. Then I started to go back and buy 8-tracks, I mean could get a dozen releases by B. B. King, Elmore James and Muddy Waters for \$10.

While I didn't understand the historical significance of Maxwell Street until much later, this is where I started to understand what the Blues was about. At that point, I still hadn't picked up guitar. I played piano & violin, but going to Maxwell St., I didn't see a lot of opportunity for me on violin, keyboards, maybe but on Maxwell St. It was basic, stripped down to a three and four piece bands,

guitars, bass and drums, with occasional harp. On any weekend, there would be up to ten bands jamming for tips. I would go from band to band and then get up the nerve to ask, "Hey man can I jam with you guys?" I sucked on guitar, but nobody cared. Most people were hung over and they let me hang out and we got to make a bunch of noise. It was an amazing experience because the camaraderie was all about the music.

The scene in, The Blues Brothers where John Lee Hooker is playing down in the heart of Maxwell St., among the crowds of people, well that doesn't even approximate the sea of people that was actually present at any given time. I had a stereo stolen from my van at practice one day, and this man said, "Hey man don't worry about it, you'll get it back". I said, "What the fuck are you talking about, my stereo got stolen out of my van". He said, "Hey dude, just go to Maxwell St. You'll find it" and sure enough I bought it back for \$25.

Apart from the Blues, gospel had its own name on Maxwell St. They didn't play sacred steel it was a stripped down combo; they usually had a female playing bass. I was always amazed how prolific and proficient women were on bass and vocals, and as I got into a lot of churches, women were

amazing talents. I mean I didn't know about Sister Rosetta Tharpe until much later, but as I got into the churches and looked down Maxwell St. the women were not encouraged to play guitar, but the could kick the hell out of bass. They usually doubled up, so as not to require another player, they would sing also. The gospel trios were amazing, hearing these distorted gospel vocals blaring through a little PA. that was going into cardiac arrest. It was pretty inspirational, and definitely something that I will never forget. The gospel made up about 20-30%, and the rest was Blues.

### THE HEALER

Only recently, a very young Michael Burks was taken from us. A genius like Magic Sam, on the verge of international stardom, died of

**"For those in poverty, healthcare is often a luxury"**

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cardiac complications, more than likely from untreated high blood pressure. Same thing happened to Freddie King, he died at a young age. Like many musicians, they were not managed for their health concerns until after it became a disaster.

After I got injured and couldn't play basketball anymore I had a really wonderful opportunity to be mentored by and played with Blues legends who were my idols – from Eddie Taylor and Homesick James, to Otis Rush and Magic Slim. Slim was really the first guy that let me get up on stage to play with him. Because of his physical presence, I felt as if we were more like kindred spirits. He wasn't just tall, he was a huge personality. These men taught me about life. I am an orthopedic trauma surgeon and spine specialist. I trained here in the Chicago area at both Rush and Northwestern Universities. I worked within the Cook County hospital system for the first ten years of my career. During that time I witnessed healthcare disparity for black people and minorities in general.

The difficulty is that there are clearly two distinct universes in America. By virtue of having multiple clinics around the South and

West sides of Chicago, I have been doctor to most all of the musicians I know and have played with over the years. In each of these instances, what really blew me away was here were these internationally celebrated artists, it just didn't get any bigger than this and yet, at the same time, none of these guys had health insurance and access to health care. It was hard to reconcile that Jimmy Reed had more hits on the R&B charts than any Blues guy ever would yet he died of epileptic seizures that were poorly controlled. His songwriting partner and guitarist, Eddie Taylor lived in abject poverty, he also had no insurance and he died from diabetic complications (on Christmas Day of all times). More recently, Otis Rush has had some pretty significant health complications that have rendered him unable to play music or sing. I was honoured to be involved in providing continuity of care for Magic Slim during the time before his death.

In the areas that are prime to the Blues, poverty is rampant and crime statistics show record numbers across the board. Unfortunately, those communities are where many of the Blues musicians have

historically come from. Here in Chicago the Healthcare for the poor and uninsured rests on the Cook County Health System. For me as an Orthopedic surgeon the system is overwhelmed. If you have a patient that needs a hip replacement, the waiting list can be anywhere from four to seven years. In a system that has resorted to rationing as a result of being over run, I have witnessed cancer patients with life threatening complications have to wait weeks to get treatment. The systems are so busy reacting to the patients who are severely or terminally ill that little emphasis has been placed on preventative medicine.

Philosophically, I do believe that everyone should have access to healthcare, regardless of ability to pay. In America, there is private insurance, and we have Medicare, which is subsidized insurance for seniors. Then there is Medicaid that the state administers to the poor, that pays 17 cents on the dollar. As an Orthopedic Specialist, I am may be one of a handful of specialists in the state that actively accepts Medicaid. Unfortunately, Obamacare is basically Medicaid. It is Medicaid that has been created on a Federal level without too much consultation with physicians. Unfortunately, people will have coverage on paper, but just because they have it on paper does not mean that their doctor will accept it. What is going to happen like in the Cook County System, there is going to be people who are going to believe they have health insurance. They may find a doctor who will check their blood pressure or help them with their diabetes, but if they are going to require heart surgery, going to get a cataract removed or have a hip replacement, they're going to be out of luck. Very few medical specialists will accept that insurance, and then those doctors like me that do will be overwhelmed.

## GLOBAL HEALTH INITIATIVE

In addition to my work as a surgeon, I co-founded a not-for-profit organization called OnePatient, Global Health Initiative. OnePatient is founded on the desire to provide resources for accessible healthcare

in underserved populations, without discrimination and regardless of ability to pay. Our organization is stationed in Chicago but does work with patients from all over the United States as well as in Haiti. In addition, we have been asked to expand and provide services in parts of Croatia, Middle East and in Lebanon. The real objective is to provide musculoskeletal healthcare and orthopedic services to those most in need, but doing so by also addressing the psychosocial needs of those we serve. It's easy to assume that you can treat a patient's physical needs but you have to take a look at how everything impacts them. Orthopedic impairments make up the #1 cause for disabling conditions in the US. There are many people with severe and multiple disabling conditions. These conditions can often give way to additional debilitations, both physical and psychological. Treating the physical aspect is only one part of what we do.

For those in poverty, healthcare is often a luxury. You know it starts at a very early age. I take care of a lot of young children, and many of these children have previously broken bones that didn't get treated appropriately. This means the injury doesn't heal right. This might not affect them now, but in 10-15 years they

may develop significant arthritis or other related problems that can become disabling. It's all about prevention. At this point, many people are coming to me that are our age-forty to fifty but are in wheelchairs. I have recently had a whole rash of young men who have had arthritis to the point that they are severely disabled, unable to walk or confined to nursing homes. We support collaborative care. We work to transform the lives of patients who wish to take back their lives. We want them to reach their potential, living normal lives and make them happy. This is something that happens over the lifetime of many people. It is a very difficult solution, and I am just one person but I am inspired daily. The inspiration for OnePatient - Global Health Initiative? Mother Theresa. The ability to change lives, even if its only one person at a time. Look, I know I cannot fix Chicago. I can't fix Port Au Prince in Haiti, but I can

**"Slim was really the first guy that let me get up on stage"**





change one person and that person will then pay it forward to the next person. As we all move on with good deeds, the "OnePatient at a time" mentality is key. We can have influence and we can change lives...one patient at a time.


## CHICAGO BLUES ALL STARS

I am incredibly good friends with all the members of the band that I play with, in the Chicago Blues All-Stars. When I was playing with Otis Rush, 25 yrs ago, the members of my band were all highly visible on the scene. At the time, in Chicago, "Killer" Ray Allison was a legendary drummer because as was the drummer for Muddy Waters. When he and I connected he was already playing with James Cotton, and he had been playing with Junior Wells and Buddy Guy. After Cotton he played with Buddy Guy for years. With 120-hour working weeks, I kind of drifted away from the scene while in medical school and during my orthopedic training. Surgical residency and fellowship was a very rigorous time in my life. Regardless, I worked hard and still had a little side clinic that I would provide care to my musician friends. I was pretty much out of the scene and couldn't play gigs. I got married, it got very time consuming. Fast forward all this time and the last six or seven years I still had many of my musician friends coming through the clinics. A couple had broken ankles; a couple came just for routine check ups and blood pressure. I hadn't heard from Killer for a long time, so I asked everyone, "What is Killer doing"? When they told me that Killer quit drums, I said, "You're kidding", because he was like the greatest Blues drummer in history of Chicago Blues. He didn't want to play drums anymore, and everyone was calling him, I mean like every major British rock/blues God was calling him to play drums and he wouldn't do it. We re-connected for coffee, and I said, "What the hell are you doing". He said, "I want to play guitar, and I just don't want to be behind the drum kit. I can't be any bigger or more successful than I was, it's just time for me to start a band, but nobody wants to accept me as a guitarist". I said, "Well let's keep talking", so we came up with the concept of launching an All-Star Chicago Blues show band that showcased multiple vocalists, a horn section and featured real disciples of the Blues genre

who were committed to keeping it vital and alive.

Blues has had a lot of problems with its image, and as much as the music is phenomenal, Blues has always been synonymous with alcohol, tobacco, drugs and bad relationships. Ray and I don't do drugs or drink, I mean we're clean; our intent was to promote Blues music in the most positive manner possible. Because we were very proud of Chicago's rich musical history and the legends that we've followed as disciples, we really wanted to showcase and try to take the Blues to the next level. This project isn't a hand to mouth thing; this is isn't about how much money am I getting at the gig. The thing is to make an impact on people's lives when you're on the stage. The opportunity to impact is on our communities is also critical. You know "Killer" Ray does some phenomenal work bringing Blues into the schools.

A guy like Ray is a very charismatic, he gives back to these young black men who in many instances don't have a positive role model at home. Ray is going into these schools with other members of our band C. C. Copeland and Johnny Cotton. They are exposing the kids to drums, to guitar and bass, and giving them an understanding that music can be your outlet. I find him to be a very inspirational and positive man. I am very proud to have him as my Brother. Looking at the two of us we couldn't be more opposite, but spiritually, we are pretty much about the same thing. The Blues for us is everything, but we're young enough that we are still trying to make the music relate to young people. We are fortunate we have a big band, with nine members, including a horn section.

When we play in Chicago, man the dance floor is packed, its wall-to-wall people. I mean these youngsters, just want to feel the Blues; it's energy and excitement. For us the number one thing is to move people with the groove, and get them up off their seats. We don't want people to sit in their chairs, and just clap, we want them to feel and experience the Blues. That is our mission; it's a holistic one that promotes a healthy mind, body and spirit. Our mission focuses keeping the Blues alive through the health and wellness of its most vital resource, musicians. 

FOR THE LATEST NEWS ON DANIEL IVANKOVICH CHECK OUT  
[HTTP://WWW.BLUESALLSTARS.COM](http://www.bluesallstars.com) AND [HTTP://WWW.ONEPATIENT.ORG](http://www.onepatient.org)

This article first appeared in issue 73  
of **Blues Matters!** magazine,  
published August/September 2013

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