

DOG MENACING BARBEQUE



i



ii

The next Saturday night featured a posh, well-planned backyard barbecue that Dave ‘Catch A Wave’ Richardson had invited us to earlier in the week. It was at his girlfriend Traynor’s place (or rather her parents’ place, though they were out of town).

Kevin O’Donnell, currently without a girlfriend, picked me up at **Fogview Apartments** in his 280Z car with the fresh brake job. I’d invited Tarna but she was scheduled to work a bachelor party gig in the FurDemando Valley. Loretta was on a date but had promised or threatened to show up late.

Traynor, or Tee, lived up the road from The Richardsons in Mission VeeAyHo, closer to Ermine. (“You mean Irvine?” “Fur sure.”) As we pulled up, we saw Dave parking in a rented navy blue Chevy Malibu and joined him for the walk up the long arching driveway to the house.

“Where’s the little black Porsche®, dude?”

“Still in the shop from last Saturday night’s rollover.”

Lights, Camera, Ocean

Nice view, nice looking barbecue, nice looking people,
nice plants, nice dog, nice looking evening.

Sociable well mannered well heeled under-the-drinking-age folk
drinking in Laguna Hills like movie stars,
lights shining from across the valley,
the lights of the hills of Mission Viejo.

We went around to the back patio where everyone was gathered. Like O’Berry’s in Beverly Hills, the backyard featured a panoramic view overlooking other expensive homes on terraced hillsides, although it was a more suburban landscape.

Pastel-colored canvas tents had been pitched with wooden tables and chairs inside; mosquito lamps and candles were being lit. A catering crew had begun serving appetizers of crêpes, French bread, French onion soup and goat cheese. There was already a small crowd. Catch A Wave did the introductions.

I spent a lot of time early on chatting with Tee's younger sister Charlize, a wispy blonde aspiring actress, and her tall handsome boyfriend Matt, an aspiring photographer. Charlize was majoring in Theatre Arts at SkidMore College out East. Partly, she said, "to get some perspective beyond these coastal suburbs I grew up in." ⁱⁱⁱ

I mentioned that albeit a computer programmer by day, I was, telltale, a struggling writer at heart, even toying with a novel. Then I asked Matt whether he went into photography more out of interest or because he felt he had a talent for it.

He answered thoughtfully, "I'm not Richard Avedon or Annie Leibowitz but I find inspiration as a photographer. By the way I think there's a relation between writing and photography." ^{iv} So what's your book about?"

"It's a book about someone who grew up in the Midwest a little too late for The Sixties but then couldn't get over them. The main character is a restless discontent who thinks if he can just get to California all will be fine and dandy but when he gets there he finds that is not the case.

"Born too late to experience The Sixties but then sucked your thumb over it for the last twenty or so odd years?" Kevin O'Donnell, slugging down a Corona and chewing on a crêpe, asked with characteristic bluntness.

"The main character and his young cronies escape the suburbs but not themselves. We didn't know if we were supposed to grow up to be drug addicts or doctors."

Traynor, who'd also been listening in on the conversation while carrying on a low key one of her own, noted: "The relationships built and experiences had were strong enough so you at least, in part, wrote a book about it."

"Sigh. The book actually doesn't focus on anyone but me for more than a few pages but I admire the thought and your strength of expression," I said.

"I'm not sure why but it reminds me some of a film I saw about a writer making a video documentary about her friends. I can't remember the title at the moment. Maybe **Reality Intrudes**?" Charlize commented.

"Charlize, the title is **Reality Bites** but that film won't come out until 1994!" Matt exclaimed. ^v

“Fine. Felix’s novel sounds a little like **SLC Punk!** or the teen romance film **Crazy/Beautiful** or even **Wild At Heart**.”^{vi}

“Those flicks don’t come out until 1998 and 2001 respectively,” Matt snapped. I suppose you’ll next feel called upon to defend Tarantino’s 1992 film **Reservoir Dogs** for its intense terse drama despite the rampant violence.”^{vii}

“So I’m clairvoyant. I’ve told you that before,” Charlize calmly replied.

“Can you see into the past too?” I asked.

“Why do you ask?”

Time Vertigo

“Well, I live in the custody of the past. My book dwells on it, thrives on it, lives on it, meddles in it and breathes it. Time slices cast shimmering unheard reflections in the present.

“And on occasion transforms it too?” Matt suggested.

“On a good day you can see far? It is a telescoping reminisce: magnify, minify and hold up the past as though it were a globe, examine it from different angles: the indifferent, the outlandish, the reasonable – as irrevocable, or as stimulus – the past as an invention, as an epiphany, a series of epiphanies with huge spaces between, abscesses, followed by climbs, a slow ascension, back to the epiphanic.”

Smoke Screen (Prose Colored Glasses) A Literary Pot Frolic, Pot Follies For The Literate

“I can get some photography analogies out of your rap, Felix,” Matt said. “Sounds like a book by someone attempting to, wondering how to, step through life as it would be if he could but maintain the proper filter or filters on his lenses, zoom or otherwise.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “various psychoactive filters – pot, chocolate, opiates, gas, psychedelic rock – and various cinematic filters, music, Prince’s façades, purple rain and women: Cassie, Tammy Joe Jensen, Joni Jean Jenkins, Vera Jane Jenkins, Professor Katy Cotati – their personas transmigrated to imagery, their auras dancing through the lines, linguistic tongue-tie-dyed filtered poetry. Even that darn **LoveGas Inc.** secretary, what was her name? Oh yeah, Teresa.”

“Of course a filtered focus contrasts with life which is, by nature, diverse, creative and organic so the filter can never be maintained,” I went on. “But the challenge! Ongoing. Daily, hourly, by the second.”

An Opus De Slack

slack·er *n.* ^{viii} ^{ix}

Since no one said anything or walked away I went on: “There is an encyclopedic aspect to it too, kind of an opus de slack... a lot of literary references, rock’n’roll lyrics, quotations and allusions, the lives and deaths of all your animals/pets, a little rhythmic philosophizing and a good dose of low-level stoned shenanigans. I think you’d like it. A constant thread of discontent holds it all together.”

“It’s tentatively titled **The Psychedelic Slacker**. I’ve got a metabolism that’s through the roof but figure that **The Hyperactive Slacker** isn’t going to make it for anyone anyhow.”

Matt’s feedback was remarkably linguistically focused for a photographer:

“I’m not quite sure about the ‘Psychedelic’ label. I understand Slacker - see modern day Gen Y, Sk8ters, cyber-punks and Goths - basically everyone in the United States between ages 15-20. But is this protagonist really psychedelic, e.g. does he wear mostly tie-dye; does he snack on psychotropic substances regularly, does he stand for hours motionless on the boardwalk at night just to watch the lights? **The Slick Slacker, The Slender Slacker**. I don’t know - just spouting.”

Artist Or Midnight Slacker – The Thin Gray Line

“Sometimes I wonder – what’s the difference between artist and slacker?”

“And is it related to the difference between a rap session and a conversation?”

“Clever. If the person produces some paintings, music or writing, it’s the former, else the latter? Dunno.”

The Slender Slicker’s Progress (Riffin’ At The Barbecue) ^x

It was a lovely twilight with a satisfying degree of coolness and, for some reason, a near-full moon – a reminder that I never finished my Faulkner reading but was, instead, stalled in mid-Snopce Trilogy. Something in the evening bred further reflection, maybe the lights twinkling in the newly falling darkness...

In a slow motion epiphany I harpooned what had been rumbling away inside for a while – my intense pretensions of a meaningful flight from the suburbs of ManyNapolis and exodus from the Midwest to the West Coast seemed now, somehow, nothing but a flat orbit completing. ^{xi} A personal, or even extra-personal ellipse, even an eclipse (I was

no good at geometry) finishing up in neither major nor minor key with unspecific, ragged, rhyme, reason or point.

“It’s kind of a **Pilgrim’s Progress** in reverse for late blooming baby boomers,” I offered. I actually hadn’t read **The Pilgrim’s Progress** but decided it best to not mention that. ^{xii} After all Bunyan’s classic was on my list and I was familiar with The Knight, The Monk, The Squire, The Wife Of Bath and Chaucer’s other pilgrims. ^{xiii}

Matt smiled: “You mean a **Pilgrim’s Progress** with no progress.”

“Exactly. None tangible anyway.” I couldn’t tell if he’d read it or was just intuitive.

“Tales of someone constantly trying to go over the edge and never quite getting there. This can be seen even in the telling – restless restive rebellious subversive power-packed prose that sometimes spreads its own edgy wings approaching further flight but time and time again pulls back to coherency at critical checkpoints. I should hope it would be attractive to anyone with an appreciation for the anarchical and the exciting.”

Matt helped himself to about his eighteenth olive.

Charlize looked up from her turkey burger: “Matt just loves olives.”

“Gee you folks should move to Italy,” I suggested.

These people contrasted nicely with my official view of Apricot County as a place where older ladies in white slacks with flip-up sunglasses idle their afternoons away hassling the baker, waiter, banker, car dealer, valet and caddy; a locale replete with retired plumpy men limping along in the left lane in aging white Caddies, manicured middle-aged housewives regal in their midday outfits from ElAy-Paris, hair done and brain too; those A.C. Babes who I’d reckoned lost little sleep figuring out if they were really nice or just pretending to be nice.

“Well Char and I have another party we need to at least put an appearance in at yet tonight. Time to move, huh babe? It’s been charming and stimulating talking with you. We’ll have to do it again sometime soon, maybe over a Watneys® or two at **Tarbutt’s**.”

“I look forward to that. And Charlize – best of luck in the future and the past.”

They disappeared down the driveway and into the welcoming arms of the moonlit night.

Embryonic Apertures

The near full moon
just went behind a
cloud, some clearings
of early night sky
like warbling donut holes
or Pending bubbles.

In another part of the backyard, voices were getting louder near the keg: yet another quiet debate over Sony versus cheaper VCR equipment and VHS against BETA had escalated into a running argument.

Why Invent The Reel?

1. It's an improvement.
2. Provides focus.
3. The truth was faraway, far away, spooled, framed, emotional read-only one minute, emotional r/w the next. A slice of life wound and unwound, footage, itself steel blue and reel.

Scattered years spent being as burnt and imaginative as possible. Suspicious: who consumes whom? Some affair.

Burnt Prose On A Schtick Avec Loretta

“Felix, I read the vignette you sent me and I have to say that it did itch me a little to read it but I am not sure where to scratch.”

“Thanks m'dear... It made me pant but I don't know which one?”

Loretta showed up about an hour later, 'round midnight, having left her date behind in the late evening dust.

“What happened to your date of the evening, what's-his-name?” I politely inquired.

“Douglas? He's history. He wanted to haul me to some party in Beverly Hills where he said he lives... or was staying anyway. He's actually kind of hard up.”

“The last guy I knew in Beverly Hills who was hard up had the name of Timothy,” I couldn't resist saying.

“Ha-ha,” Loretta offered with little humor.

Someone remarked “I heard O’Berry snitched on Eldridge Cleaver back in the Sixties to save his own white ass.”

“Tim would tell you, if you wanted to know the real story, to read his autobiography **BackFlash** which I still have an autographed copy of. I suspect, to be kind for a moment, that he was also victimized by the Military Industrial Complex and wouldn't have been in the paranoid position that led to selling out without their having hounded him. As far as I’m concerned one possibility is that he was another of Thoreau's men leading “lives of quiet desperation” but substitute “media-seeking” for quiet.”^{xiv}

Writing And The Line Of Scrimmage

“I couldn't have done it otherwise. Gone on, I mean. I could not have gone through the awful wretched mess of life without having left a stain upon the silence.”^{xv}

“Writing is a concession, like a holed-up gunman who finally surrenders because he wants a pack of cigarettes.”^{xvi}

“Time should be a tool, not just a dwindling commodity. Use the past, make fiction, or it will make mincemeat and marinated nonsense of you.”

Somehow the conversation again turned to literature.

“Let’s talk about literature again,” I suggested between kabobs. I’ll lead. I wonder if the post-Elizabethan letdown, bringdown, depression, i.e. The Jacobean Era was similar to the Sixties post-partum blues/malaise.”

“That,” said Loretta, “is not something I would know. Hopefully not to change the subject, I’ll proffer my own question: Is life a dance or a battle?”^{xvii}

“Loretta-some, I thought you'd never ask. Both? And a wild chariot ride full of sound and fury. So what are you reading lately?”

“I’ve been rereading **Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me.**”^{xviii}

“If Percy Bysshe Shelley had been a pothead, do you suppose he would have approved of Fariña’s prose outing?”

Kerouac’s Ghost (Eyes Half Shut)^{xix}

Then, in what I took to be a magnanimous gesture, I apologized to those who’d already heard the spiel an hour before and gave the newly arrived a quick summary of [**The Psychedelic Slacker:**](#)

“... driving at a novel... nothing more than an episodic rant on my post-high school years... the rueful misadventures of a restless young poet who missed the Sixties, the hip, by an inch, a mile and a smile...”

O'Donnell had had a few beers by now and, with no girlfriend present or random hottie on his arm, was in an argumentative mood: “**The Psychedelic Slicker**, huh? An episodic rant on your post-high school years in the upper Midwest? It won't be a bestseller in today's market. Too tame and mainstream. Petty.”

“It's **The Psychedelic Slacker** by the way and your opinion's been duly noted. Alternately put: my burnt prose offering is cyberpunk roosting at the end of a naked roach clip in the hands of a discontent young man, a struggling writer who makes it from the Upper Midwest to Southern California in pursuit of his dreams.

A coming-of-age tale, a post-Kerouac Bildungsroman, it is nothing less than the escapades of a post-suburban post-hippie early slacker pot poet whose self-written epitaph reads: ^{xx}

To Die For: To Be Published By [City Lights](#)

“Wow, I am intrigued... Where can I buy the book?” Loretta asked.

“It's still on the stove (my angel),” I replied.

“Speaking of the Midwest, do you think that people from MiniSoda have one foot in Lake Woebegone and another in cyberspace?” asked Loretta.

“Interesting. Where did you come across that?”

“Felix, I read the line in one of the many mystery books I read. I cannot recall the name of the book, sorry. So if you use it, you'd better change it.”

I finished up with my own favorite line since reaching D'Eggroll:

“I have a grudge against The Thin Cities and Minisoda.”

“Why?” Loretta, like the CHP officer who had pulled me over in Miranda Beach several years back, inquired.

“The place didn't make me happy.”

Just then, at that very moment, there was a noisy interruption as Sidney, a good-sized Dalmatian belonging to Charlize, made a run at a plate of hot kebobs that had just been taken off the outdoor gas grill, upsetting a few chairs and a visiting four-year old neighbor kid in the process.

“How are we going to keep Charlize's dog, Sidney, away from the barbecue?”

“He shouldn't be hungry.”

“Why not?”

“I fed him half a quiche not more than an hour ago.”

Excerpted from [The Psychedelic Slacker](#)

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By Alan Mark Train

For [Don't Dye Here Studios](#)

i

<http://www.outdoorabode.com/charcoalgrills.html>

ii

http://www.barbecue-online.co.uk/barbecue_equipment/gas_barbecue.htm

iii

Orange County (2002)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0273923/>

iv

“I think I have learned tremendous lessons about writing verse from being a photographer, and vice versa... Even photography’s technical aspects play a role in how I think about writing. A camera’s aperture at its smallest allows for the greatest range of focus, the sharpest detail. It’s a useful metaphor for me when I think about how I want to narrate an event.” Excerpted from “Lives of the Artists,” article and photography by Andrew Seguin (published in the May 2005 issue of **Vision Magazine**).

The article features this quote by Henry David Thoreau:
“The question is not what you look at, but what you see.”

v

Reality Bites (1994)

<http://us.imdb.com/title/tt0110950/>

vi

SLC Punk! (1998)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0133189/>

Crazy/Beautiful (2001)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0250224/>

It was easy, second nature, to identify with the restless, troubled Nicole in the teen romance film **Crazy/Beautiful**. Well, not that easy given that **Crazy/Beautiful** didn’t come out until 2001 but, otherwise, a piece of cake. She, too, was savvy of her own reckless behavior and rebellious attitude, declaring “I’m seventeen. I’m supposed to be out of control!” So what if was thirty – I deserve the same entitlement.

Wild At Heart (1990)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0100935/>

Another impressive teen flick. On the surface there’s nothing but a lot of parental noise, harassment, boredom and comic flatulence. But it has a further perspective, one of youthful desperation and passion, lurking behind it.

vii

Reservoir Dogs (1992)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0105236/>

viii

One who shirks work or responsibility: “In terms of their outlook on the future, slackers regard tomorrow with a studied cynicism or... don't even conceive of one” (Julie Caniglia).

<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=slacker>

Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition
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ix

“Slacker: dodger, do-nothing, gold brick (*U.S. slang*),
good-for-nothing, loafer, shirker, skiver (*Brit. slang*).”

x

Riffin At the Barbecue by Nat King Cole, 1939 Savoy Records.

<http://www.jass.com/tom/next/jazrt/colet.html>
<http://fablepower.org/pslack/audio/RiffinAtTheBBQ.mp3>

xi

<http://fablepower.org/pslack/audio/Take02-DogMenacingBBQ.m4a>

xii

<http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/m.sion/bunypilg.htm>

xiii

<http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm>

xiv

“He moved to Los Angeles, and started socializing in Hollywood circles, a natural evolution for those attempting to alter perception. He believed that Hollywood and the Internet would be the LSD of the 90's, empowering people on a massive scale.”

<http://www.rotten.com/library/bio/mad-science/timothy-leary/>

xv

A quotation from Samuel Beckett.

<http://www.hinduonnet.com/2001/02/18/stories/1318017u.htm>

xvi

Excerpted from a KNX 1070 AM Los Angeles radio broadcast (time and date unknown).

xvii

“So the platonic Year
Whirls out new right and wrong,
Whirls in the old instead;
All men are dancers and their tread
Goes to the barbarous clangour of a gong.”
Nineteen Hundred And Nineteen by William Butler Yeats.

<http://www.eliteskills.com/c/2431>

xviii

Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me by Richard Fariña, © 1966.

<http://www.richardandmimi.com/beendown.html>

xix

"I hated high school, I prayed it would end...
Charles was a dancer, he loved the ballet
and Kimmy sold pot and read Kerouac and Hemmingway.
... these are my friends."

Excerpted from Drag Queens In Limousines by Mary Gauthier, © 1999.

http://www.rambles.net/gauthier_drag.html

“Jack Kerouac took old Highway 6
Traveled across the great divide
Wrote books and poems as he rambled
Confessions that he couldn't hide
Inspired a whole beat generation
To put their thumbs out in the wind
Took that long road less traveled
Again and again.”

Excerpted from Bohemian Cowboy Blues by Jimmy LaFave, © 2005.

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/lyrics5.cfm>

“Ginsberg and Kerouac

Shootin' dice and playin' Ramblin' Jack's guitar...”

Excerpted from Cold Dog Soup by Guy Clark, © 1999.

<http://www.cowboylitics.com/lyrics/clark-guy/cold-dog-soup-49.html>

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<http://www.bookrags.com/studyguide-bildungsroman/>