

FORUM

Smith Says

When the funk falls

BY JULIE R. SMITH

I woke up last week with my throat feeling like I'd swallowed broken glass. Then I coughed up what appeared to be a chunk of lung, sneezed and cracked a rib.

Yes, the funk done fell upon me. Like the wag once said, first I was afraid I'd die. Then I was afraid I wouldn't.

My nose dribbled blood and my tongue was coated with a moldy-looking mix of green and brown. My voice was hoarse and cracked; I sounded like a haint keening from the grave.

"Ah don't fe-heel so go-HOOD," I squawked.

"Please don't talk," Widdle winced. "Really."

So I tried to write on the dryboard in the kitchen, but the marker kept slipping from my sweaty fingers, so I gave up and communicated with hand signals and broken hissing.

"I'm going out to the road and lay on the center line," I said. "Leave me there until at least two SVUs run over me."

"Lie," he corrected me. "You lay a brick, you lie in the road. Besides which, it's Sunday and there's no traffic until church gets out. Can you wait that long?"

"Whatever," I said. "Do we have any honey?"

"Oh, holistic healing again," he groaned.

Mock if you must, but over the years I've found that many ills can be nipped in the bud by eating a Spanish onion chased with two tablespoons of honey. Sipping a jug of Gatorade seals the deal.

Unfortunately, this time the onion and honey failed. In fact, the Gatorade brought the whole shebang back up.

When I'm sick Widdle always sits outside the bathroom door, yelling advice: "Put a cold, wet rag on your neck! Hold your breath! Suck on a sock!" (OK, the last one is a lie.)

When I staggered out white-faced, wet and drooling, he put his arms around

me. "Go back to bed. I'll take your temperature."

We have two expensive thermometers in our house, and they aren't worth a plugged nickel.

One said my temperature was 118 degrees. The other apparently believed I was already dead and didn't register any numbers at all.

Then it got scary: As I lay (lied?) in bed, suddenly I couldn't draw a breath. I mean no air, period.

I looked at Widdle and gasped, "I can't breathe."

He grabbed his keys and my arm. "Get dressed," he said. Bent over and wheezing like a walrus, I pulled on tennis shorts and a dog-hair-covered sweater. Off we went to Doc-in-a-Box.

Now, I'm figuring I'll get a prescription for a broad-spectrum antibiotic and be on my way.

What I got was: tubes of blood drawn, a lung function test, a chest X-ray, a breathing treatment with a nebulizer and a physician's assistant who listened to my lungs and said, "You sound horrible. How long have you had asthma?"

"I don't," I said. "No-one in my family does."

"Well, you sound horrible," he said.

Turns out I had bronchitis, a sinus infection and a throat infection (not strep, thanks be to God.)

I walked out with prescriptions for an inhaler, an antibiotic, steroids and codeine cough syrup (which I didn't fill because codeine makes my heart race like a rabbit's.)

The funny thing is, I had no fever at all. But at the drugstore, I bought a three-dollar thermometer anyway.

You never know when the funk might fall again.

Julie R. Smith, who is eating the baseboards after a week of Prednisone, can be reached at widdleswife@aol.com.



Fanfare for the Common Man

I am a Rock n' Roll Star

BY DAN BROWN

This weekend I got to be a rock and roll star.

This was my second weekend reconnecting with new/old friends I'd never met. These were classmates in college way back in the late seventies and early eighties that, except for a couple of beer drinking buddies, I never hung out with, never did stuff with, and certainly never talked to.

Now I wonder how I survived the last 28 years without them.

Suddenly, thanks to the magic of Facebook, these "Old Friends I've Never Met" are now my "Best Friends I've Just Met."

Have you ever been given a genuinely serious and tight hug from a complete stranger?

I got one of those last Saturday night from one of my new Best Friends.

Her rocker groupie name is Roxy (I'll explain that in a minute). Back in college she was known as Jim's Girl. We never talked, and on an occasion or two occupied the same room in whatever college dormitory party we both attended.

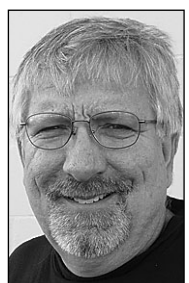
We saw each other for the first time on Saturday night and she gave me one of those special "Best Friend" big and tight hugs then said, "It's so nice to meet you."

Roxy is no longer Jim's Girl, she's Jim's Wife and has enjoyed that status for more than 25 years. Both are two people I wished I'd made more of an effort to get to know better way back when.

Along with Stix, Trixy and Spirit Raven - I'll explain those in a minute also - we spent the evening together catching up on all the old times we never shared.

All this thanks to social networking.

How did we ever survive without Facebook, My Space, and Instant



Spazz (Mike Rhodes), Rokkit (Dennis Mullins) and Paper Cut (Dan Brown)

Messaging? It's a wonder mankind had ever been able to communicate before this.

We've come a long way from the rudimentary paintings on those cave walls in France.

Roxy, Trixy and Stix have become three of my closer friends in a life that can count total friends on both hands and a foot.

I have several acquaintances, but very few friends. Along with Spazz and Rokkit, my bandmates in this Post-Fifty-Non-Garage Band called Night Flight, they can be called my Almost-Best Friends.

Any of y'all that know me, know those are numbered very few.

Before there was the Internet I was a painfully shy and self-conscious teenager who could do two things well, write and throw a baseball, and then a father of two children. I never had time for friends outside my family because I never really made any friends outside my family.

Not until Facebook.

My best friend in the whole world is someone I've only met in person twice, but we've known each other coming up on six years now.

So this was some weekend, driving 13 hours through a foot of snow and

rockslides, and surviving a couple dozen White Castles to boot.

All this to be a rock star.

Which brings us back to the rocker groupie names. Roxy is Diane, Stix is LeeAnn, Trixy is Cheryl and Spirit Raven is Sharon. Night Flight consists of Spazz (Mike), Rokkit (Dennis) and me, Paper Cut.

Paper Cut is like Slash from Guns n' Roses. I may not cut deep but I can be very painful.

More amazing than knocking off 24 White Castles in two days is the fact that I had four people tell me they loved me this weekend, and two of them were guys.

All because of Facebook.

I just listened to a song called "Lucky Man."

It was my rock star debut, my first lead vocal performance of any kind outside my shower or car with the radio cranked.

At 52, I discovered I actually can carry a tune in a bucket.

I found the choice of song to be extremely poignant. Plus, I don't believe in coincidences.

The first line of the chorus - well, the only line of the chorus goes like this, "Oh, what a lucky man he was."

I certainly was.

Lowcountry Riffs

Darkness at midnight

BY JIM TATUM

The story you are about to read is true. In fact, I'm astonished I'm still around to write about it. It's funny how a passing decade turns a nightmare into a fond memory. Sort of...

Mike cranked into a high octane riff, that Marshall JCM 800 stack screaming like a wounded banshee. I came in right behind him on the dual guitar lead break, my trusty old Carvin Blues Tube roaring right under Mike's ballpeen hammer-like riffs.

In front of us, lead vocalist Eric was soaring all over the high tenor vocal wail of "Defy You," a particularly instigating anthem of rebellion by a band called The Offspring.

We have to be good. We have to be real good. There's a huge fight going on right in front of us.

Golden Survival Rule Number One: When playing a bucket-o-blood honky-tonk like this one, if a fight breaks out, keep playing. If you stop, the whole place will erupt. If they rush the stage, go for the windows. If there are no windows, pick up anything that will keep you out of range of fists, feet, and blunt objects and start swinging.

It reminded me of the movie "Roadhouse," a cinematographic masterpiece inexplicably snubbed by the Academy. Who could forget such classic lines as, "This place is so classy it's got a sign over the urinal that says 'Don't eat the big white mint.'"

That line pretty much sums up this place we're playing. Black spray paint on basement windows that look out on nothing. Duct tape on beer taps, pool table felt, and sound system speakers. It

is a place frequented by meth heads and hillbilly punks, all of whom are getting into what we play, but at the break, they'll be hip-hopping to the most hardcore gangsta rap there is, eyes pinning and swirling as the stuff they've ingested scrambles their brains into senseless omelettes of emptiness.

I wouldn't darken the doors of this place on a bet. Yet here I am onstage because it pays well. Now I have a glimmer of what they mean when they call it "Combat Pay."

The melee started when two guys got into a shoving match that probably started over something one of their girlfriends said. They hadn't so much as toed-up at each other before six huge bouncers closed in on them, put them in hammer locks, and threw them bodily out the door.

Then a couple of girls got into it, and the next thing I see, eight redneck babes are all over each other. They're far more vicious than the guys - hair pulling, eye gouging, kicking, punching, biting, the works. One even has some sort of metal knuckle-duster in one fist; she gets in a lucky shot and the girl she pounds suddenly goes down like a sack of wet cement. Another one slings her adversary - a big ol' hoss of a gal with a rear end that moves like a litter of puppies fighting in a blanket - right into my monitor.

I take two steps to my right and keep right on playing.

By this time, the bouncers are all back in the bar. But they're no help; they're



mesmerized. I guess they think this is hotter action than mud wrestling. Finally, one of the bigger girls picks up a skinny little thing, punches her in the face and shoves her into our soundboard.

Our sound guy, Jerry, finally gets into the act.

Jerry's big, about 6'3" 235, and tough as a keg of nails. He just wades in and starts slinging them right and left. The bouncers finally break out of their stupor and start hauling them out, one by one.

A couple minutes later, another girl appears out of nowhere. She's so incredibly trashed I can't believe she's actually moving under her own power. She trips over the top step of the stage, falls over my guitar stand and proceeds to vomit uncontrollably all over that door. Two bouncers drag her, unconscious and toes first, off the stage and out of the bar.

And we keep right on playing as though our lives depend on it - and they probably do.

And all this was but a highlight of our first set.

About halfway through the night, we all go out to the parking lot and after a few minutes of venting, we make a solemn pledge that we will never, ever, ever play this place again.

Then at the end of the night, the owner is counting all the money he made. He loves us. Just has to have us back.

No way, we say. It's just too long a drive from where we live.

He triples our pay if we'll do the following evening and one weekend a month for the next six months. We all look at each other shaking our heads.

And except for the yellow police tape strung in front of the stage, the following night isn't so bad.

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