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the dirtbag times



inside: trans fear & the post-election matrix - parenting at the end of the world - a november longer than january - 21st century middle aged boy - pedal pushing - micro musing - wounds - countertops & highways - tip your bartenders - record reviews



NEW PAPER, WHO DIS?

**the dirtbag times is a
magazine by dirtbags
for dirtbags.**

editorial bored
kelly menace

art splendidness

katie killer, rowan menace, & wonko
zuckerberg with maren farmer, james
gray, danielle sperandeo, william daniel
thompson, & tony willingham

print jockey
craig wheel werker

**folks that did the other
shit for us**

bethany beeler - creepy horse - mike l.
downey - tishia jackson - tim lara -
spring pearson - pamalyn rose-beeler -
starkness

on the interwebz

<http://www.thedirtbagtimes.com>
redchapterjubilee@yahoo.com

materials for review & bribery can be
sent to:

the dirtbag times c/o kelly menace
16 foxberry dr.
arden, nc 28704

From 2008 to 2021 a group of Central Texas dirtbags ran a community newspaper for the Bryan/College Station community called *979Represent*. It started out as a newsprint tabloid designed to fill in the void from the local newspaper's recently deleted Thursday entertainment pullout. We ran album reviews, band interviews, a concert calendar, and local alternative community news, like stories on roller derby or a new municipal skatepark. After a couple of years we discovered that we *loved* writing and assembling a publication every month but none of us wanted to sell advertising. So we let the paper go in September 2011, only to retool the format a month later in a 'zine format. And we kept on for another ten years, photocopying the zine on the sly on a secret photocopier at the local large state university photocopier.

But then a funny thing happened. That dirtbag community began to move away from Central Texas one by one. Some of us moved to Austin, Maine, Chicago, Colorado. Then I moved to Asheville, NC in 2018 and Wonko and Katie moved to Fort Collins, CO in 2021. We decided to put *979Rep* to bed in December 2021 with the idea that it would re-emerge as a national version of the paper a month later as *The Dirtbag Quarterly*. But then 2022 came and went without a new zine. We published a best-of anthology called *979Represent The Book* and sold out of its first edition. It looked like we'd never get back to it. But then shit went sideways at the polls on Election Day 2024.

I became very afraid for my community, both local and scattered across the country. We listened to each other express our fears, our concerns, our anger, our dismay, our incredulity, and our keen observations. It felt to me like the right time to bring the paper back out of mothballs. We all needed a place to communicate again. Not just for our sakes but for the sakes of everyone disenfranchised by the forthcoming Orange Curtain. We all needed a way to stand up and be counted, to make sure that we all have a way to confront the next four years of dumbfuckery that is assuredly coming our way. Not to mention that our individual communities all have their own challenges, especially here in Asheville where we continue to pick up the pieces (literally) after Hurricane Helene shellac'ed significant portions of our area.

It won't all be sturm und drang. You'll get music writing, you'll get art, you'll get short stories, you'll get serialized fiction and comics, you'll get immense amounts of sarcasm, pop culture analysis, and pretty much whatever fun that is submitted to the Editorial Bored. If you like what you see, Venmo us some cash so we can keep paying to print and to post online. Wanna place an ad? We don't charge for it so message us for dimensions. Wanna participate? We'd love to have your content. Check the column to the left for how to reach us. — KELLY MENACE

PARENTING AT THE END OF THE WORLD: A QUIZ



At Lego Club, your son makes mounds of loose blocks — flood debris. It's a pretty fucking spot on representation of your street. He's even found pieces that look like your porch. Another Mom suggests that he's being insensitive to people who are actually experiencing loss.

Do you:

- A.) Ask him if he wants to build a dump truck and clean it up?
- B.) Ask her where she lives and how long her internet was down?
- C.) Start making your own mounds?

You go to the Halloween parade at your daughter's school. One of the big kids is dressed as Joe Biden, with a big Trump button on his lapel. He does a pratfall, and the principal thinks it's so funny that she makes him get up and do it again so everyone can see. The whole gym erupts in laughter and your kindergartener (who has no idea who Joe Biden is, and who only knows Trump as a toilet scrubber turned bath toy) is laughing right along with them.

Do you:

- A.) Grab her by the hand and march out of there, registering for homeschooling the next day?
- B.) Boo loudly?
- C.) Try to make eye contact with the only other parent who isn't laughing?

A plastic slide has washed up in your trees. The kids want it.

Do you:

- A.) Keep it? The flood giveth, and the flood taketh away.
- B.) Drive upriver and try to figure out where it belongs?
- C.) Throw it in the debris pile? After all, it's

probably contaminated.

Your daughter gets made fun of at school for the off-brand Oreos in her snack box. She wants to know why you won't buy Nabisco.

Do you:

- A.) Tell her the truth—you won't buy Nabisco because her late grandmother didn't buy Nabisco because they (used to be) owned by Phillip Morris and (even though you still smoke) Grandma didn't want to give money to Big Tobacco? It's an out of date and hypocritical boycott, but you're stuck with it.
- B.) Lie and tell her the off-brand ones are healthier?
- C.) Give in and buy the fucking Oreos? (Bonus) Google Nabisco and learn that the new parent company is still evil and justify your flimsy objections with a convenient truth?

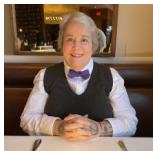
Your son's speech therapist asks him how his house is coming along. He replies, "It's fucked."

Do you:

- A.) Praise that nice clear F sound? (after all, they've been working on it).
- B.) Blush and blame your husband? "Dad hasn't been feeling very optimistic lately."
- C.) Tell her, "He's not wrong."

Scoring: Circle your answers or write better ones. Assign each answer as many points as it takes to make yourself feel like you're doing a good job. You're winging it. We all are. And it's surreal and horrifying and beautiful and strange. Your kids are going to be fine, and so are you. You'll get through this disaster, and then there will be new ones, minor and major, personal and public, and you'll get through those, too. And in between, maybe you'll get to have a little fun. — *SPRING PEARSON*





RED OR BLUE: TRANS FEARS & THE POST-ELECTION MATRIX

We've known

the results of the presidential election for about a month now, but I still find myself reeling and filled with fear—not just for my future, but for my sweet Bethany, the woman I love more than anything. The reality is that the election has left us both shaken. To say that transgender people have every reason to fear in this political climate is an understatement. The stakes are high, and the uncertainty is overwhelming.

"If you are not of us, you are one of them." – Morpheus to Neo in *The Matrix*

consider trans individuals a "protected class," so they can legally be discriminated against in employment, housing, and public accommodations. As of November

2024, the following states have enacted laws restricting transgender individuals from using restrooms that align with their gender identity in public spaces, some extending beyond schools to include adult public facilities:

- Alabama
- Arkansas
- Florida
- Idaho
- Iowa
- Kansas
- Kentucky
- Mississippi
- North Dakota
- Oklahoma
- Tennessee
- Utah

Bethany has faced daily challenges in a world that is often unkind to transgender people. She's dealt with discrimination and hostility simply because of who she is, but she's also fought for acceptance, visibility, and the right to live authentically. The campaigns, election, and aftermath have us both questioning if all that has been gained for marginalized communities in our country will soon be lost.

We are left wondering, where do we go from here, mostly just figuratively, but the literal question has also been discussed. The anti-trans campaign ads were violent and chilling, with far-right politicians launching repeated attacks on transgender rights – attempts to roll back protections for those in the military, to limit access to healthcare, and to deny basic human rights in public spaces. Project 2025 has provided a roadmap: start with kids' sports and move on from there. The fear is real and the fear has grounding in real-life scenarios.

For many who identify as trans, the biggest fear is the loss of necessary healthcare. Every major medical and mental health organization deems trans healthcare as necessary and in so many instances, life-saving, and yet, candidates use the needs of trans persons as a political football to be thrown about in order to win votes. It's an assault on the well-being of my spouse and countless others and a lot of cis people seemingly don't care about it enough to speak out.

Beyond healthcare, there are legal difficulties as well. Over half of the states in America do not

On top of these tangible threats, there's the emotional toll. For whatever reasons, people were willing to vote for candidates who openly vilify the trans community – who see trans persons as less than. Watching someone you love come to terms with this reality is heartbreaking. The number of times Bethany has asked "Why can't people just let me be me?" over the past several months... well, it's a lot of times... and I know I don't have a suitable answer.

I try to offer comfort and support for Bethany, but some days, it's hard to pretend everything will be okay. We are both afraid, and I know that this fear is shared by many transgender people across the country. For now, we continue to fight and advocate for ourselves and each other. But we need everyone in the fight, especially cis-het, white men. Transgender individuals make up about 0.5% of the adult population in the U.S., so they are an easily ignored and targeted group. There's so much at stake right now, and while it's not always convenient to focus on issues that don't directly affect us, we must recognize that when rights are taken from a few, the many will be next. – PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER



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A NOVEMBER LONGER THAN JANUARY: A HAPPY HALLOWEEN! SPELL TO RIDE OUT DEPRESSION & DESPAIR

I haven't posted a blog piece on my Substack for quite some time. Doesn't mean I haven't been writing. Actually, I just published two books—a fantasy (*Shadow & the Cobra*) and the nonfiction *Magik: How Witches Save the World*. And I've been baking and cooking my eyeballs out, as well as doing a few paintings here and there. Also, I went to Wales with my son, Paul, in May, for a fantastic trip, the nodes of which will surface in my fourth novel in *The Chronicles of Diana Atestesso* series, coming to your bookshelf in a year or so.

So, no creative blocks.

Miasma

Since last December, it became clear that the Asshat Jackwagon would be elected. Oh, the tease of summer/fall hope that Kamala and Tim gave me! Then the decrepitude that is the American electoral process snatched it away, plunging me into a deep depressive spiral.

I've been struggling for a year now with horrendous anxiety and depression. Mind you, none of it was triggered by gender dysphoria. Nope. I know what the triggers were—the looming terror of being hung out to dry as a trans person in the country I call home.

The world looked so strange to me. At any moment I'd look at things around me, bogged by how this thing we call civilization and life is so ... strange. The most deranged jockey living in a

fiberglass tree, tripping balls on acid, couldn't've come up with the unreal world I lived in.

Stumble Forward

I slogged through the months till a ghoulish November 5th nightmare on the heels of Halloween made the most terrifying Stephen King novel look like Nancy Drew. Through November, I had to do what **ASK MOLLY** (Heather Havrilesky) counsels:

Stumble forward, into this wicked autumn hour, almost defeated, every awkward footfall a resolution, every inch of progress a clumsy victory. You are an ugly catastrophe, an old house collapsing, a fury of limbs and longing, rage and regrets, windowpanes and doorknobs, nails and splinters, whipped up into a tornado and carried into the future, ass over ankles, fridge over floorboards, daydreams over despair.



Nails it. I have to ride out depression. Which doesn't make it feel better. I know the fit will end, but in the throes of it, the agony feels like it fits too well. It clings and envelops till I can't see me, only wretchedness unrelieved by any soothing voice and sane words from loved ones. In fact, the pain arms

me with hellacious arguments for why I'm doomed, no matter what anyone says. Messenger meet killer. Ask Pam. She's been slain countless times, even though I know she's right. She, of anyone (including and especially myself), delivers the best love, support, and comfort in those dark hours ... only to get doomsday Babs for her

efforts. No good deed goes unpunished, eh?

Pointless Resolutions

And I can't stop myself from acting on the spiraling plunge in my heart. Making resolutions that'll flee the country, or fight even when they put me into a reeducation camp, or actually try to enjoy the music of the Osmonds (brrrrr). Anything but hating myself or forcibly detransitioning, both of which amount to the same thing.

In such tailspins, the only thing on wings at the edge of feeling and thought is that *I'm still here to think and feel*. Even if it's misery.

I Can't Predict the Future

I've no idea what's actually going to happen. I've plotted all the out-of-control scenarios. Unlike others who live in states like Texas, Florida, and other Republican hotspots, I'm in Colorado. I've a circle of friends and loved ones who stand by me, even when I drip with loathing at my potential fate. But still, the agents in *The Matrix* keep coming at me.

Yes, the month after Halloween became a nightmare longer than the coldest, most interminable January. Transition saved me from self-hatred—and put a target on my back. Something ghoulish seeped out of Samhain and polluted my sense of joy. But it wasn't of Halloween.

The Antidote

In fact, Halloween and the other Sabbats of the Witch Year are the only antidotes. They won't take away despair-inducing events. Won't preempt any disasters to come. Yet, they'll ride

me through being me, even when I'm poisoned in heart and soul till I don't recognize the world I live in.

I won't surrender who I am. You see, even in the worst ravages of depression, *I still get to be me*. My two-year-old grandson, Nicco, reminded me of that. We visited him last week. His happy dance was to run about the house, singing his cover of Miss Moni's Halloween song. Mind you, we were on the verge of Thanksgiving. We urged him to yell, "Happy Thanksgiving!", "Merry Christmas!, or hell, "Happy Birthday!" even.

His joy was this song. And we sang it at his behest. Again and again and again. (You're welcome for the insidious ear worm I just gifted you.)

Just like Nicco, I, too, this Thanksgiving, in the

bosom of my family, had inconsolable crying jags that no amount of solicitation or distraction could stop me from feeling. You know how a toddler can cry—like the world as they know it has ended.

And it does end. Every moment. And we each have our own Halloween songs to holler, especially when the time or season makes it completely unfitting. Because fitting snugly into despair is no way to live. I can't—and *won't*—sustain it or allow a bunch of asshat jackwagons to make me live that way.

I'll ride it out. On my broom, I'll wicked fly. Because, rather than saying "Fuck them!" I can sing something better. **"Happy Halloween! I'm still me, no matter what you say otherwise."** — BETHANY BEELER



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MICRO MUSING

Writing is bizarre.

I spent most of 2024 sending my eventual 28 science-fiction/fantasy short stories to magazines/websites. After 100 rejections, I stopped counting, but the rejections continued. No publications.

Then a fellow writer says the Romance Writers of America takes articles from non-members, pays 35 cents a word. They wanted something on National Novel Writing Month, one of my favorite annual activities. So, I wrote nearly 1500 words extolling the fun of NANOWRIMO. They bought it, published it, paid me. After all those rejections of my fiction, I sell a non-fiction piece about writing fiction. There's a bizarre moral there. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

COUNTERTOPS & HIGHWAYS

My stomach rumbles, reminding me of it's need for another beer as flies circle the air telling me it's time for another smoke of the greater kind—the greener kind. I hear a tapping that slowly grows to annoy me with each shot I pour myself, before realizing I am the source of my own discomfort. As if in defiance my bowels howl back—letting ghosts around know I can also be the source of my own relief. I wipe the sweat off my brow to calm my nerves a bit more. The days-old counter burritos are turning, but my hopes are that all alcohol in my gut will sanitize anything in the grips of spoiling internally.

I cough a few deep coughs in response to the fire I'm ingesting celebratorily with my lungs. An ignored TV in the background begins to catch my attention and makes me snot myself as I hear someone yelling about not making enough from bathroom handies at a fast-food stop and still not being able to afford a full meal, then being instructed by the law on scene to perhaps charge more for the illegal service in the first place so they can eat and don't have to take as many risks or jack as many cocks. They nod that this makes sense, but that they feel guilty for charging more than \$3 for a handy and the combos are \$10 something with tax. So they still had to work since some customers "nut & ran."

The gravity bong calls me from across the room as I laugh at this modern Shakespearean comedic tragedy. In the midst of my smoky meditations a song gets stuck in my head that the world has yet to hear, but that I know suddenly know like the back of my hand. I hear the whole thing at once from the beginning to the end in one solid moment and then spend the next several days trying to get it down enough to share with someone to possibly humor enough to fully flesh out. The dogs fart in unison around my feet while I type reminding me of their support. The bottles call at me from across the room knowing that I do not always dance as the bashful lush so many are accustomed to. They whisper secrets of better times to be had and begin to work their sultry dance on the blackened meat chest lump that I carry around internally with incense.

An old jingle from years long gone gets stuck in my head and I want nothing more than to visit this place that no longer stands in bricks and mortar, and I somehow do so within myself. For that moment I am awash in the collective experiences of this hunger haven from yesteryear as a solid whole I stand in past-present in the now. I have just time traveled. I am a time traveler of sorts, I think to myself within a new found confidence. It was all so real. I could see, smell, hear, and almost touch it all. I can do anything and go anywhere at anytime, confined or not. Gut rot be damned. I am a metaphysical cosmonaut born to taunt all you cannots. Somewhere there's a bourbon waiting for my sip in a better moment than I have yet to know still, in a calm I have yet to know, and another mountain to climb. I steady my brow and adjust my stool at the bar. Being a bartender in spirits I wait on myself and commune with those missed now long passed. Another round for another crown, gained from another quest across the cosmos. I retire to my stupor smiling, knowing time is also in the mind. — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



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PEDAL PUSHING

CATALINBREAD BITTERS

For many years the Alesis Bitrman was my secret weapon effect. I bought my first one in 2002 when Guitar Center was closing out the entire Alesis ModFX line. I have since worn out two more. I've used them with my synthesizer rig and figured out the myriad of ways to use it in a guitar rig, both on top of my amp and on a pedalboard. It is not truly a guitar pedal. I think Alesis intended for DJ's to use them but included a footswitch jack for hands-free on/off, so I used a number of sustain pedals and boutique-built on/off switches as well as looper pedals to use it with my feet. It's not a very robust housing and sometimes the Bitrmen got noisy and took up lots of space on my boards. It took dedication to use it on a board live. I've always wished someone would figure out how to rehouse the Bitrman into something more road-worthy and giggable. Imagine my surprise when a few months ago Portland-based effects maker Catalinbread figured out how to shove a Bitrman into an actual guitar pedal! I think I might have set my debit card on fire from whipping it out my wallet so fast to preorder.

So what is so special about this thing that I would break my neck trying to be the first in line to buy one? The original Bitrman was a digital multi-fx device that combined compression, distortion, stereo phasing, and "bitness". One could set the order of the four effects to one's own liking. The "bitness" is what this pedal is all about. It has settings for comb filtering, "decimation" (a sort of digital aliasing effect kind of like older analog cell phone distortion), bit reduction, frequency modulation, ring modulation, and frequency shift (akin to ring mod but instead of sum and difference frequencies it only gives the sum). Essentially it was a way to digitally fuck up your signal at a time when such things could really only be accomplished via computer. This effect did not sell well. For starters, I think no one knew what to do with the form factor. No one could tell it was for DJ's or for guitarists. Also, no one knew what to do with those effects. Guitarists are a conservative bunch and generally want analog



effects. The Bitrman glorified in its digitalness by taking the weird things about digital and exploiting them.

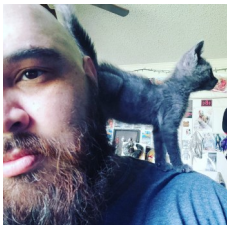
Catalinbread largely kept all the functionality in place when porting the Bitrman to the Bitters guitar pedal. Three of the six bitness effects are accounted for (FM, ring mod, and bit reduction). The phaser is present, though no longer in stereo (the whole pedal is straight mono). The two main differences are that the compressor is traded out for a mix pot and the selector for arranging the order of the effects is set up on a single pot instead of two 6 way switches. Not every order is represented but each bitness effect has two signal pathways.

How does it work in action? It can raise a holy terror of a sound when sweeping the "bitters" control. Ring mod does the ring mod, bit reduction gets super crunchy and gated, the FM warbles and squeals. The phasing is pleasant and at higher settings (especially if set before the bitters effects) can alter what frequencies are affected. What is a pleasant surprise is that the MIX pot allows for this pedal to become a one-stop modulation source. Set the ring mod low and with a bit of dry signal and you have a tremolo pedal. Set the phaser and mix to taste and you have a cool 4-stage phaser. Dime the bit reduction and distortion and you have a ripping velcro gated fuzz. Set the FM low and the mix at noon and you got a chorus pedal, and with the mix pegged clockwise you got vibrato. While it is unfortunate that half the bitness effects are missing it is more than made up for by having the pedal be a sort of Swiss Army knife of modulation effects PLUS a good bit of digital weirdness.

The best part perhaps is that it's a real pedal and it's meant to be used in a guitar rig accordingly and you can stomp on it without breaking it. It won't make me sell the original but I don't think it's meant to. It gives guitarists a reliable way to get an introduction to this interesting and long out-of-production effect. Retail is \$179. — KELLY MENACE







21ST CENTURY MIDDLE AGED BOY

Sometimes I forget that I am old.

They say age is just a number and while I believe that is true, that saying ceases to exist when you realize that you are in fact old.

I'm forty eight now. I should have seen the writing on the wall sometime around 2003 when at the young age of 27 my dad said "You're not a spring chicken anymore" the thought hit me that I was indeed not a spring chicken, but I wasn't "old" was I?

In 2006, my band at the time was in talks with a music producer in Houston to record and produce our record. The deal was horrible, they were getting a huge chunk of change from the success of the record (if any was to be had) and pretty much owned the masters of the music but I had been playing punk for fifteen years or so at the time, I was aware of the four year curse some people talked about saying if it hadn't happened for a punk band in four years it wasn't going to, and being overdue, I just really wanted an album that I could see in a record store.

We recorded the album in a warehouse, using live tracking and vintage analog equipment. I remember the sound engineer being so excited, because the label at the time only worked with rappers (Houston rap was huge at that time), so he rented beautiful reel to reel machines, vintage mics and monitors. I remember the surreal experience as I stood in a vocal booth other successful musicians had recorded in, there were scribbled lyrics on a table someone had discarded. (In hindsight I should have grabbed them and looked to see if there was a market for them on eBay).

A week later, we returned for a photo shoot in the label's studio. After the shoot was done, the producer in charge, used the computer mouse and zoomed in on my hand. He circled a wedding ring I was wearing from my first marriage. "You can't wear this shit," he told me. "You're single, got it?" he paused and asked, "How old are you anyway?" "I just turned thirty," I told him. "Nah he said... you're twenty five got it? If anyone asks, you are twenty five and the rest of these guys are twenty." The whole thing left an unsatisfactory taste in my mouth. The deal fell through, which was probably for the best. A few weeks later, the masters from the demo mysteriously found their way to me from the sound tech. "I worked too

hard to record this," he explained. "They'll never know if you release it by yourself."

In 2010 (I think) my current wife and I (who weren't even dating yet) were in between bands and decided to start a podcast playing underground music. It was basically a way to hype up our friends' bands (and get into free shows and an excuse to interview bands we had no shot of talking to ordinarily.) We called it "The Old Man and Bitter Girl" show. I was obviously "The Old Man", my philosophy being that I was old in punk rock years (if this is true I am positively ancient now.) The show had a six year run. We met a lot of bands, got to interview some of my heroes, and scammed our way into bigger and bigger shows and comic cons. Eventually we landed a spot on terrestrial radio where after six months, we quit. It turns out radio isn't too friendly to bands we liked to play and censoring out the words to keep it FCC approved was a chore.

Around 2017 or 2018 I figure it's time to hang up my combat boots. Brea, my wife, is concentrating on art and the music scene in our hometown is taking a dive. I remember thinking about music as I contemplated my future in it.

Music is fickle. Well, the fans are at least. You can be hot shit one day and nobody the next. Your whole life can be reduced to one song that "made it" and even that song can disappear in a year or two with no one remembering it.

I remember shows I did in the 90s with hundreds of people showing up. Booze, drugs if you wanted, girls, people screaming to every single word. That was gone, no one remembered, the fans that were at shows then were parents now. I was playing to their kids.

That thought hit me one night talking to a girl who had come up to the merch table who said her mom knew me. "Oh?" I asked. I was thinking maybe her mom knew me from a day job. "Yeah," the girl said, "she used to go to shows in Sun Valley back in the 90s." I smiled politely realizing this girl, even though she was twenty one, had never known a Dallas Cowboys Superbowl win. I nodded and politely ended the conversation.

I didn't want to be the tired old man who was still trying. I was having problems writing music, which was hard for me, because I ALWAYS had something to say. I knew how powerful this

genre was, at least to me. It might sound silly, but this music kept me out of way more trouble than it got me in. I think about my cousin, who spent years in prison for gang activity knocking over liquor stores knowing full well it could have been me if I chose another path.

I wanted to respect the music. I wanted to respect the muse. If the muse wasn't speaking to me anymore, so be it. I would book my last show and see myself off.

The last show was great. I booked bands I always wanted to, my favorite band was touring so I put them on, since we were friends, they gave us the headlining spot. I couldn't have asked for a better night as I sang those songs for the last time, and headed off to live my life in obscurity.

I was happy in obscurity. Then politics happened. Living in Texas, I saw shifts of laws for the worse. The party who cried about living free became more oppressive to women. Mexican immigrants came under attack. And then they messed with the public library.

I like the library. It was my home away from home. Being poor, I delved into knowledge and free books. I can't tell you how many books I read in my lifetime, but if I had to estimate it is in the thousands. When my local library was under attack by local politicians and prayer circles I was enraged.

What does an artist do? They make art. I can't paint. I can't draw. I can't sculpt. Hell, I can barely write. But I can make loud deafening noise.

Brea and I talked about putting the band back together. It was good fortune while in these talks we ran into our guitar player in a Wal-Mart as he was looking for duct tape or something, casually bringing it up. After many false starts, the band began again. We started salvaging old songs and writing new ones. The result was fantastic.

When it came time to talk about shows again, we were at a loss. A few years out of the game and the landscape to what we had known was very different. The club we used to book closed down, the local bands we played with closed up shop and it seemed the scene was dead.

In the oncoming years of my "old man" phase of life, I had taken to going to breakfast with a couple of my old friends on Sundays. Yes, that

sounds like something very "old" but I enjoyed it. It started as coffee in the backyard after shows and ragers, then grew to just having coffee on the patio with no hangover, then eventually eating tacos in a Mexican restaurant.

It was at one of these morning breakfast sessions I lamented to my friend Eli that the scene was dead. "There is nowhere to play," I told him, "No bands play anymore, kids don't even go to shows." Eli shook his head. It wasn't the first time I had said that. "What are you talking about?" he said. "There was a show last night in some pet store." "What?" I said, "did people go?" Eli nodded. "It was packed," he said. "There were kids.. I mean KIDS, people I hadn't seen before." I was surprised, shocked even. He forwarded me a flier on the old social media channels later that day. There was another show happening next week. I shot back a message "Let's go."

The next week, we showed up to the "venue." It was a pop up show, which I loved. The place was a pet grooming salon that had cleared the back area for bands to play. Inside, there were people. It was packed. Other than a couple of people playing in new bands that I knew, the place was mostly filled with faces I hadn't seen. This was great.

After one of the band's sets, I walked around the outside area. I talked to my buddy some more. "This is insane," I said. "I thought the scene was dead." "Nah," he said, "We just aged out."

I took that to heart. I didn't want to do pasture parties. I'm too old to hide from the cops. At my age, I'm probably the guy who claims it's all MY beer.

There's not a problem with shows, it's my approach to them that is wrong. Things have changed. I can't promote a show like I used to. The majority of my friends, like me, aged out. They are driving minivans and going to bed early. Or, like me, they are out of touch. I looked at my buddy Gary, who is still going strong and raging with the crowd.

It's still possible to be an oldhead and around this music. It's okay to not be top dog anymore, and it's definitely okay to not have to book hundreds of shows a year to stay relevant. The Kids are alright. I still have stuff to say. Age doesn't change that. — TIM LARA

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One of my deepest wounds is realized in my daily life as an insistence that I am fine, am going to be fine, and that everything is fine. This artificial positivity is a strategy I learned and that was reinforced by life.

WOUNDS

You see, I've always been described as positive, happy person. The one most of my family, friends, and even acquaintances turn to when they need a smile or someone to show them the "bright side" or for help of any kind. It's true, I am mostly a positive, happy, and helpful person. I also adapt to change quickly, forgive easily, and I can find humor or lessons or comfort in every dark, hard place. But, just like every other human on this planet, I do have negative moments where I go to a place so dark and sad, I struggle to find the light. Or negative moments where I feel defeated, lost, and like a failure. Moments I cannot twist into a positive. Opening up about those moments always resulted the same "Oh, you're strong, you're positive, you don't need help. You see the world different: it's candy, kittens, rainbows, and everything happy in your world."

So I learned to hide them.

Over the past two years though, I've realized that the artificial positivity was a toxic strategy with a very high cost. It blocked the openness and vulnerability required for deep connection and deprived me of the nourishment we all require as humans. It limited my creativity and growth and ability to be responsive and adapt to change.

The antidote to this is vulnerability. But, in moving from the artificial positivity to authentic vulnerability, I was met by grief, resistance from other people, and a whole lot of hurt. I felt alone, ignored, invisible, and like a fake version of myself. Unfelt, stuck emotions that had lived in my body since I was a little girl told me that they were stuck in a dangerous place and needed to move. I tried. My body, in lockdown, refused to let it all flow. That's when a soul-sucking, paralyzing grief hit me and the more I tried to fight it, the deeper I buried it, the stronger it became.

Eventually, it clicked: that grief was trying to communicate with me and to understand its message, I needed to give in to it.

I was a week into this process of trying to

destroyed, and disintegrated the last of my armor of artificial positivity. It cut me right open and all of my fears and hangups and darkness and guts spill out and I could see it all and damn, what a mess! So, crap, how the hell do I get guts and hangups and fear and darkness out of the carpet? Club soda? Mustard?

I loved my best friend, she was the older sister I always wanted. She was beautiful with a tender heart. She accepted me for everything I was and supported me in what I wanted to be. She tried so hard to get me to open up, and one time, thanks to being so drunk, I was nearly falling off of my barstool, I tried. My drunk words made little sense, though.

My best friend was the first person I truly connected with. As much as we were able to, of course. Connection requires vulnerability. And vulnerability requires tenderness. And tenderness will bring tears.

And who the likes to cry?

Well, me. After breaking down and allowing my grief to consume me, I say with it. I spent time understanding it—all of it, from childhood to the death of my best friend. Once I understood it, I stopped repressing it, and other "negative" emotions. I still struggle to open up to people, but I sure as hell have nearly mastered the language my emotions use to communicate with me.

I knew I was being called to grief before my best friend died and I resisted it in my bones even as I moved toward it. But once my best friend died, my resistance stopped.

There was more misery after her death and there will be more in my life. And I'm not alone, so many of us are hanging off of the ledge by our fingertips. Homeless, scared, rejected, poor, starving, unemployed, heartbroken people all over this world. Hitting rock bottom but pretending "this is fine." "I am okay."

We are not fine. But, we're in this together and that is why I share this story. — TISHIA JACKSON

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Letting Go is Messy

<p>SHARING IS CARING <small>SELF CARE IS GOOD TOO</small></p> <p>CREATED BY: <i>XX</i></p>	<p>IT'S VERY EASY TO DO... WE GET CAUGHT UP & FORGET TO SET ASIDE TIME... DOING WHAT WE CAN TRYING TO HELP OTHERS WE CAN... NOT WORRIED OF IT.</p>	<p>UNTIL WE REALIZE WE FORGOT TO SAVE SOME MOMENTS FOR OURSELVES TO COLLECT OURSELVES OR TO DO THE THINGS WE NEEDED OR DREAM</p>
<p>The only thing we ever truly own is our time & it's infinite at best. Still it never hurts to help...</p>	<p>HEY GOT A SEC?! I CALLED ...</p> <p>HEY DO ME A SOLID</p> <p>SURE, HAPPY TO HELP</p> <p>BLAH BLAH BLAH</p> <p>ME!! ME!! ME!!! US!</p> <p>THIS! THAT!</p> <p>WHEN WILL YOU BE FREE?!</p> <p>HEY! WHERE I called and told you exactly what I needed. It's NOT too much!!</p> <p>Can you stop by after work and lend me a hand?!</p>	<p>ALL OUTTA TIME...</p> <p>Hey got another sec?</p> <p>UMMMM</p> <p>WHY DIDN'T I GET AN ANSWER? SO I CAME OVER... ANYWAYS...</p> <p>WTF!?</p> <p>WHAT ABOUT ME?!</p> <p>YOU CAN MAKE TIME!</p>



CREEPY HORSE TAKES CHICAGO

Hello world, it's been a while. Since we last spoke a lot has happened. I'm currently writing this in between an essay about

Church Taxation and a speech about Food Poverty in America. You guessed it, Creepy Horse went to school. I came to Chicago in August to study at a University and life has been beautiful and crazy and wild and stupid.

I went through a lot these last years. From years of having unmedicated mental health issues, I finally had a full mental break. What I thought would be a couple of days in a mental health facility while my meds got worked out turned into a couple of months of E.C.T. Fear not, for it made my "drug resistant" depression finally manageable. I had a new lease on life. For the first time in over 30 years, I flourished.

I finally got myself clean and sober and life began to improve. I was able to do things I hadn't before. Then I found out one of my dearest friends had terminal cancer last Thanksgiving. I don't know if a "previous" me could've been present for her in her state.

I regretted so many friends that died I hadn't been there for. I was able to be there for her. I simply put myself in her shoes. How would I feel if I was dying and no one was listening to me? How would I feel? It was far too late to talk about how she had handled or not handled her disease. To do so would be to waste such vulnerable time. All we had was that very moment. All I could do was just love her. She cried to me about how no one touched her anymore or just listened to her. People forget just how important human touch really is. She'd become terrified and angry. She was in so much pain. I wish she hadn't suffered as she did. She made it to her 45th birthday and left us on the 4th of July this year. Cancer is disgusting and hideous.

Two days later, I'd just come back to Rented Mule's apartment where I'd been housesitting while The Escatones played Michigan. Hurricane Berwyn was approaching and I had just carried in the last of my foods and hurricane preparations. Rented Mule called to check in as I was bringing in the last bag. I had him on speaker phone when I heard a sound I had never heard come out of our cat SBJ. I said I needed to check on her and as soon as I pulled back the curtain to see what was going on, I discovered her on her back struggling to breathe.

I got off the phone with Rented Mule. This wasn't happening. Not now. I was by myself. I held her, trying to stimulate her and get her to breathe. I remember begging her to please breathe for me. She struggled, then let out a horrible sound and her entire body went completely limp. I knew in

that moment she was gone but I was still trying to save her. I couldn't give up.

I put her in a carrier and sped towards her vet, running red lights. I pulled in and jumped out my car. I was beating on the glass and screaming. The place had closed early due to the Hurricane that was on its way. I tried one more time to resuscitate her. There's a horrible moment in adulthood that I've shied from my entire life. Being the one that makes the big decision in a moment like this. The adult in me knew her brain had been without oxygen too long and she was gone.

I cried, embracing her body to my face as I accepted our fate. I collected myself as best I could to call Rented Mule back with an update I didn't want to give. I called and apologized. How horrible for this happen and him hear it while in another state. He had me meet with his parents so we could figure out what to do. I arrived at their home, cradling her still warm body in my arms. Steven of The Wheel Workers was kind enough to offer her a sunshiny spot in his backyard as the storm made its way to landfall. Once again, I had to let her go so she could peacefully be buried before the Hurricane made landfall.

On the car ride home I bought a pack of cigarettes and a soda. I came back to the apartment, walked in and sat on the couch and just stared into the darkness of the tv screen as the storm raged outside for hours.

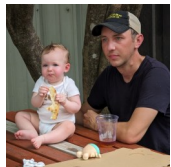
My living situation after the hurricane became difficult. I had discovered while on a trip to Chicago that you can exceed a threshold of hours at Community College and was subsequently banned from attending. My only option was to go to a University. While I was still in Chicago, I checked out a local University. I was bummed, thinking I'd never be able to attend a school like this. Well, that shit went out the window after everything I'd been through.

My friend would've given anything to be here another day. I don't take that for granted. Losing her and SBJ reminded me of the vulnerability of life. Nothing is promised. There's a beauty in that. I sold my car (she's now a band car for punk band The Mydolls), I took whatever would fit in a van and I moved clear across the country to live by myself in a dorm.

I have no fucking idea when my day will come and I don't care about the past or the future. I'm just living in the here and now, putting one foot in front of the other. I hope to show life always happens. It hurts. It can be so painful it burns. But it can also be beautiful and hilarious. Our hearts will get broken. We will smile again one day. Our marriages will fail. We will fall in love again. We will cry until we can't. We will laugh and not be able to stop. — *CREEPY HORSE*



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TIP YOUR BARTENDERS

Well, I'm a goddamn bar owner now. So here's a treatise about the service industry in our country.

On average in my business my tipped employees make about 20% off of gross sales. That's one hell of a lot better than what I make off of it (granted there are seven of them and one of me). But, I'm the one shouldering all the risk. Even if the business is losing money, the tipped employees still make a percentage of gross sales. So, the assumption seems to center on "Those cheap owners, why do I have to pay their staffs wages?". Not only does the customer have to pay the wages in any business, they have to pay the rent, utilities, food costs, insurance, trash pick up, water etc. If customers do not pay at least 100% of the costs of a business to operate that business closes.

The next argument is "Just raise menu prices to cover tips so I don't have to feel bad about not tipping". And here is where they've really gone off course because that would actually cost customers MORE money than the current tipping culture/system.

The assumption is that I can just raise my prices 20% (to cover the tip rate) and eliminate tipping and servers/bartenders can make the same amount of money. Here is why that is wrong.

- Sales Tax: There is no sales tax on tips. But, if tips were rolled into the menu price the cost of the tab not only went up by 20%, sales tax also went up 20%. The cost of the tab is now 22% higher.
- Insurance premiums: The premiums of the various types of insurance a restaurant/bar must carry (with the exception of insuring the property itself since that's based on its appraised value, which has its own other set of bullshit) are based on gross sales. Assuming that at the higher price, total volume remains the same (which it won't but I'll get to that) gross sales increase so insurance premiums increase. That cost must also be added to the cost of the tab (increasing the menu price and the total sales tax paid again)
- Employer payroll taxes: This costs about 13% of payroll. The increase in payroll increases the amount of employer payroll tax (which increases the menu price and total sales tax paid again).

These are the big three. It is, therefore, cheaper for the customer to pay a lower menu price and tip.

Now let's talk about what happens at the higher price point.

Restaurant/Bar spending is highly elastic. What does that mean in economics? "If a small change in price is accompanied by a large change in quantity demanded, the product is said to be elastic (or responsive to price changes). Conversely, a product is inelastic if a large change in price is accompanied by a small amount of change in quantity demanded." At the higher price point, volume will decrease. You may achieve the same gross sales

but the volume moved to get those sales is lower (less items sold at a higher price). This reduces the demand for labor. There will be less hours available to work. At a higher price point, the size of the customer pool a restaurant/bar has to draw from will shrink. Tipping creates a sliding price scale for customers. One customer may pay less than another customer for the same tab because they tip less. Our average tip rate is 20%. Some customers tip 40%, some 20%, some tip 0%. A \$10 tab costs customer A \$10 and customer C \$14. If you eliminate tipping and raise the price to \$12, customer B will still come and probably still tip while customer A has been eliminated from your market (decreasing volume and the need for labor).

Now let's talk about the employees specifically. Tips are federally protected wages. I can't touch that money. It must go to the tipped employees. If I raised my prices and eliminated tipping, that money is now MINE to do with what I please. There are plenty of operators out there that would just slide some of that money into their pocket. With regards to inflation: Because tipped employees make a percentage of their gross sales, a big chunk of their wages are directly tied to inflation. If my costs go up 3% and I have to raise my prices 3% they make 3% more in tips. Flat wages instead of tipping uncouples tipped employees wages from inflation. So, keep that in mind when you hear a server complain how they are making the same hourly wage they did 10 years ago, because they are not. Their tips have increased with inflation.

Then there is the issue of fair compensation between tipped employees. Tipped employees make a percentage of their sales volume. If tipped employees made flat wages instead, how many would be clamoring to work a Friday or Saturday night, deal with all that volume and stress when they can just work Monday and make the same amount of money? I'd rather be off on the weekends! Our lowest total hourly wage tipped employee averaged \$16.25 an hour (tips + hourly) last year and our highest almost \$35 an hour (tips + hourly) last year. But, the \$35/hr employee worked the toughest shifts, handled more stress and offered more flexible hours (aside from just being a better employee period). The tipping system directly accounts for the difference in how much effort the two employees put in last year. How do you account for that in a flat wage system? And don't tell me I have to do additional hours of payroll acrobatics with fluctuating hourly payrates based on demand, because I've tried that, and it just doesn't fucking work.

With the tipping system in place now, the highest value, most talented and hardest working employees are directly compensated by making a percentage of their higher gross sales and they are directly compensated for working the toughest, highest volume shifts. I know that this entire fucking screed screams "poor me, I own the means of production and need more," but this is the reality in our country. – STARKNESS

RECORD REVIEWS



Kim Deal

Nobody Loves You More

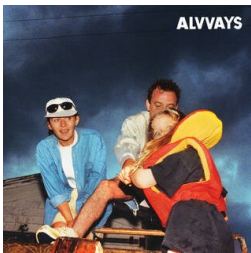
Kim Deal is an untouchable artist. She has an impeccable track record from her unassailable work with the original go-round of indie rock royalty PIXIES and her own bands BREEDERS and THE AMPS. Both Pixies and Breeders were shared endeavors and The Amps was a one-and-done band/album from 30 years ago. Many would consider those bands as *her* bands so the idea of releasing a solo album might seem to be a weird exercise. Yet, here we are with the very first Kim Deal solo album, *Nobody Loves You More*. It is both very familiar and at times it carves out new artistic territory.

The songwriting is quite familiar. It is not hard to hear any of these songs as filtered through any of her other bands with amped acoustic guitars, haphazard lad guitars, and a quietLOUDquiet dynamic. All of those are present. But the album really breaks new ground for Deal tonally and lyrically. Right off the bat, the title track and "Coast" prominently feature

horn and string arrangement. "Crystal Breath" uses modern drum production, rhythmic loops, and crunchy synthesizer pedal-tones. "Big Ben Beat" borders on late '90s big beat electronica and industrial. The lush string quartet and pedal steel guitar arrangement for "Are You Mine?" have an Owen Bradley country-politan sound that would not sound out of place on classic country AM radio. "Summerland"'s strings, strummy guitar, and easy swing sounds like pre-rock middle of the road pop like Connie Stevens and such.

Deal's lyrics are often impressionistic and nonsensical yet the imagery sometimes lends itself to interesting interpretation. This is all still present but there are times that I'm pretty sure I hear a certain directness and vulnerability in the lyrics that are pretty new to Deal's oeuvre. "I may find deep regret/ waiting for me in the end" and "Standing strong/it makes me wish I was young" when sung in a handgog tone with her cigarette-ravaged voice sure seems as close to direct confession as I believe I've ever heard from Deal.

I'm most impressed that Deal is exploring new territory and challenging herself to find new tones and new songwriting themes while still very much sounding like herself. — KELLY MENACE



ALVWAYS

ALVWAYS

Blue Rev

The latest album by the Canadian pop group took them three years to release, but it was worth the wait. Now I'm always suspicious of record reviews that contend "not a bad cut on the album" because when you listen to those records, you always hear a couple of clinkers.

You know what's coming—there's not a bad cut on this album. Just hear me out. The older I get, the more I'm drawn to melodic rock, so it's the music that attracts me first. Later, it can be the lyrics.

Crank up the first cut on *Blue Rev*—the title of the song is "Pharmacist." I have no idea what vocalist Molly Rankin is singing about, but it doesn't really matter because the music is just so gorgeous. The group calls their sound "jangle pop." That genre means pretty much what it sounds like: pop that moves. There is no ponderous slow emotive "pay attention to my suffering" here, just solid rock and roll that is fun to listen to and

doesn't make you want to feel sorry for yourself.

To be honest, the songs may want me to feel sorry for myself once I learn the lyrics, but then if I have to work so hard to understand them, perhaps it's best I don't. I'm okay with that. I love Springsteen and The Ramones, and even with song titles, there are words I haven't been able to decipher after decades of listening. And I'm fine with that. The music is enough.

Alvvays cites such bands as Pavement and The Smiths among their influences, but frankly, I don't hear any of that in their sound. To my unsophisticated ears, they most resemble early The Pains of Being Pure at Heart, but with a female singer possessing a much better voice without the fey undertones.

Now I'm sure with repeated listenings, I'll be confident enough to label certain songs as better than the others, but for right now, *Blue Rev* is like the proverbial box of chocolates. This one's good with the chewy coconut center, my favorite. But this one has that amazing peanut-caramel crunch. No, it's my favorite now. Let's try this one.

Finally, you have got to like any album with a song titled "Tom Verlaine" as well as the hands-down best two-word description: "Pomeranian Spinster." Viva Canada. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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