

We Were Having A Party But We Weren't Invited

by Chris Okum



No One Watches When The Ambulance Pulls Away

You were raised like an exiled prince in a condemned castle. You told stories about your father that made him look small when maybe all he was trying to do was instill some much needed humility into your grandiose personality. You played music they called rock and roll but which sounds more like Leather Cabaret music for a culture that can't stop fetishizing the 1950s. You dressed like a Jamaican for a

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short time even though there is absolutely nothing Jamaican about one single note of one single song you ever wrote. You tried so hard to write the music that Jim Steinman eventually did with ease. You wrote some songs that sounded much better when sung by other people. You played with a bunch of musicians who were better suited to weekend gigs at a bar in Paramus. You ran around the stage like Jim Valvano after the North Carolina State Wolfpack won the 1983 NCAA championship on a buzzer-beating alley oop and kept doing it for four hours a night over the course of almost sixty years. You inspired the worst group of imitators of any musician ever, which inadvertently highlighted not how good you were but how lame the people who liked you were. You hated Trump, like so many did, but just because you did didn't mean the people who didn't like you liked you any better, which proved once again that the enemy of my enemy is not my friend, but still my enemy. You became a billionaire and hung around Bill Gates while the both of you watched your equestrian daughters with shit-eating grins. You moved to Los Angeles and married an actress who had no idea how to act and then realized that it made you look bad in the eyes of your fans who had always thought of you as a working class hero who lived just like they lived even though it was all an act because you'd never had a job in your entire life which was what allowed you to romanticize a life you never wanted to live, not really. You talked like an Okie Dust Bowl ranch hand circa 1934. You made a music video about baseball where you tried to show off your pitching skills and it made you look like someone who had never thrown a baseball not once in their entire life. You made a music video where you drove around the city at night after pretending to be a car mechanic with a perpetual hard-on. You had a movie made about your life and they cast a young man to play you who looked like a Willy Wonka/Oompa Loompa hybrid on steroids. You participated in 'We Are The World' and gave the most overwrought vocal performance in a room that also included Steve Perry, Al Jarreau and Cyndi Lauper. You wore a red bandana in the back pocket of your tight blue jeans, which made my mother insist for years that you were gay and into water sports.

You wrote a song about Vietnam Vets that was misinterpreted as uber-patriotic by right-wing morons, because how could it not when the song is supposed to be in the vein of other great protest songs but is more than just vague enough to be thought of as the exact opposite. You were addicted to the worship of your fans and tried to pay them back in kind because you thought you owed them some kind of debt and you could never get over it. You never knew that Peter Laughner was who you were trying to be, but it was for the best because you couldn't access that kind of depth of negative feeling even though you spent your old age trying convince everyone that during the 1970s you were depressed as hell despite all evidence to the contrary. You wrote a song called 'Jungleland' that sounds like the showstopping final number in *The Candy Man*, a Broadway musical about the life of Pittsburgh Pirates starting pitcher John Candelaria. You wrote a song that contains the lyrics "She'll let you in her mouth." You created one character for yourself to play and then never broke from that character, even when you should have, even when it would have invigorated and improved your songwriting. You were called the "the future of rock and roll" when you were actually its past, frozen in time, pretending as if the 1960s never happened. You did not ask for this eulogy, but this is the one you should get.

Roses Never Fade

He searched for Journey, the arcade game, not the band. He had no idea why. It just came to him, suddenly, while he was stuck in traffic on the freeway. He wasn't even listening to the radio. He was just sitting there, hands on the steering wheel, listening to the music of a band that would never, ever get its own video game, and then an image flashed across his mind, the members of Journey hopping into their insect-like spaceship. He grabbed his phone, and while keeping an eye on traffic, he quickly searched for images of the videogame, which came up immediately. He used to try and play the game when he was a kid. One of his dad's girlfriends would drive him to the

mini-golf/arcade place next to the 405, hand him a twenty-dollar bill, and tell him she would be back in two hours to pick him up. After changing the entire twenty into tokens, he would make a beeline to the Journey machine and start feeding it. No one was ever at the Journey machine. Everyone was always playing Zaxxon or Dragon's Lair, two games he found impossible to comprehend. Not that he was any better at Journey. He was, in fact, horrible at arcade games. He could not figure out what he was supposed to do or how to do it, and what he was supposed to do in the Journey game was help the band find their instruments. No matter how long he stood at the machine he never got any better at it. Yet he would stand there, putting in one token after another until he was completely out, which was usually around the thirty-minute mark of his two hour stay. He would spend the rest of the time wandering around the arcade, eyeing other machines to see if they were a little more user friendly (none ever were), and watching the other boys play Zaxxon and Dragon's Lair. There were never any girls in the arcade. All the girls were outside, playing mini golf. He would stand and watch the boys play games that seemed harder to him than advanced math. The boys understood the patterns of the games and would play one token for an hour and eventually defeat the machine to a round of polite applause and back slaps. He had no aptitude for patterns, and as such, no aptitude for videogames, an aptitude he would never acquire, not even as an adult. "I'm in the mood for a melody, I'm in the mood." That's what he remembers hearing all the time, the voice coming out of the arcade's speakers singing, "I'm in the mood for a melody, I'm in the mood." When his dad's girlfriends would pick him up, they would ask him if he had a good time and he would say yes because he could feel that implied in the question was that there couldn't be any other answer than yes. One time one of his dad's girlfriends picked him up dressed in what looked like lingerie. She was sweaty and telling him to hurry up and get in because she had to get back to his house and take a shower before his dad got home. He remembered almost every single woman his dad dated, especially the ones who drove him to the arcade, and specifically the

ones who drove his dad's car while wearing lingerie or a bikini. But what he didn't remember was to keep his eye on traffic. Staring at the image of the Journey arcade game he had lost track of time, and now there was a large gap between his car and the car in front of him. Someone honked, then someone else honked, and then someone pulled up alongside his car. They rolled down their window and screamed, "I hope you get AIDS." In the game, if you completed all five of the minigames the band would play to a crowd of alien fans. A collision with any obstacle or projectile cost one life and returned the player to the selection screen. When all lives were lost is when the game would end.

The History Of Post-Covid America As Told By The Manager Of The Produce Section At Pavilions Supermarket

The avocado game was rigged. We sat at home and watched 32 hours of television in one day. Dogs threw themselves in front of driverless cars. Our children charged strangers for an extended looksee of their no-no squares. Members of Congress were replaced with robots. The Mafia bought the Marines. Black mold grew in our Chuck Taylors. All the cucumbers went bad. Our daughters spread rumors regarding our imminent demise. Movies disappeared. Men over the age of 40 threw away all of their clothes except for one t-shirt and three pairs of the same pair of boardshorts. Cocaine was finally approved as a cure for obesity. People gave up on washing their lettuce. People with dementia were smarter and happier than those without. We hid yellow hammers in our burgundy pant suits. Stiles from the original 'Teen Wolf' saved us from drowning. Potatoes were intentionally grown green as a way to foreshadow the coming global famine. An octogenarian John Lennon was seen holding a copy of Julian Jaynes *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* while walking by himself into an Applebees in Gardenia, California. It was revealed that the Nazis actually won World War 2 and that the last 80 years of human history as taught in school and universities has been the greatest misdirection in human

history. We peed in our shoes. We shat in our tote bags. Men fantasized about drinking blood from a stone. Women learned Krav Maga. Babies were born already knowing how to fix the transmission of a 1977 Pontiac Firebird Trans Am, particularly the Special Edition model popularized by the movie *Smokey and the Bandit*. People stopped speaking in complete sentences and started calling people who did dumb. We looked for things we didn't even know we lost. Grown men dressed up as Jerry Sandusky for Halloween and walked up to little boys on the street and said, "Gimme some candy, little buddy." We cleaned our toilets with the same rags we used to wipe our hands. Doctors turned into stand up comedians. Sandwich makers turned into revolutionaries. School teachers turned into their students. Information turned into a bomb. Some of us lost the power of speech. Most of us gained the inability to read. All of us coughed. The apples turned into oranges. The grapes learned Japanese. The broccoli lost its crown. Most of the fruits and vegetables simply gave up and walked away.

Every Day I Die

He searched for Cheryl Townsend. He was watching *The Wayward Cloud*, a Taiwanese film directed by Tsai Ming-Liang, about an adult film actor which features musical numbers and watermelons, and it made him think about a girl he went to high school with who, right after she graduated, joined the porn industry and became one of its highest paid performers immediately after performing her first scene, a latex orgy featuring some of the businesses' most renowned stars, whom the aforementioned girl from high school seemed intimidated by not one single bit, which was rare, all involved agreed, that some 18 year old would walk into her first scene out of nowhere and completely dominate it, her name spreading like a virus throughout the Valley, she made enough money in 22 months to last her for the rest of her twenties. Her name was not Cheryl Townsend. He, like every other boy at his high school, had acquired a long and stringent crush on the girl who became the porn star, and

during his sophomore year it looked as if the crush might go requited, with the girl telling him that she wanted him to come to a party she was going to, a party he wasn't invited to, a party that he was now allowed to attend due to the fact that it was the girl who wanted him to come. So he went to the party and looked for the girl and when he found her she said hello to him like she didn't remember that she was the one who told him to come to the party and then proceeded to ignore him for the rest of the night, instead paying attention to a friend of his, a friend who knew how much he liked the girl, a friend who, at one point, as the girl was leading him into one of the bedrooms, looked at him and shrugged, as if to say, "Really, you can't expect me to say no to this, can you?" He watched as his friend and the girl went into the bedroom and then he sat down on a chair and since he didn't know anyone else at the party he started to look around at all the tchochkes and knick-knacks sitting on the tables and shelves. He picked up a baseball signed by California Angeles first baseman Rod Carew. The baseball had coffee stains on it. He smelled the baseball. Someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Cheryl Townsend, a girl from his high school he knew of, but did not know very well. "Looks like your friend is gonna have a super awesome night," said Townsend. And that's all she said. Then she looked at him and smiled and walked away and as soon as she was a few feet away from him he threw the baseball and hit her in the back of the head. He didn't throw the baseball very hard, and she wasn't hurt, but she was mad, and he was immediately ashamed, so he left the party and never looked at or spoke to Cheryl Townsend for the next two years of high school. It was something he felt was out of character for him, but maybe it wasn't. It was easy to forget all of the shameful things you did in your life. Everyone wonders if people who act badly spend their time thinking about what they have done and they probably don't, only remembering what they have done infrequently and for no more than a few minutes, if that. Guilt doesn't seem to stick. What seems to stick are the reasons that led to the action leading to the possibility of feeling guilt for the action, and how the action was inevitable, almost out of

one's control. He could not find any information on Cheryl Townsend other than a picture of her holding a mangy white mutt. In the picture she wore a giant hat that obscured most of her face. He wondered if Cheryl Townsend ever searched for him. He wondered if you ever forgot the person who threw a baseball at you and connected with the back of your head. He had wanted to make a lasting connection with the girl who took the adult film industry by storm, but instead he had one with a woman whom he knew nothing about. *Daddy's Worst Nightmare 3* is available to watch on multiple free tube sites, and has 5.7 billion views.

