

## tom and the pot demons

For a while, I remember, Tom carried his horn around in this sleeping bag sack. It was a nice horn too -- an old Bach or Selmer. I remember him walking down the hill to Fremont Street after band rehearsals with that yellow sleeping bag cover, tied with a string and slung over his shoulder. Once when I asked him about it, he said that the horn had been given to him without the case.

Later I learned from someone else that Tom had thrown his previous horn off of the Bixby Creek bridge. He believed that God no longer wanted him to play the trumpet -- that music had become an idol and, therefore, an evil in his life. When I first heard this story it impressed me so much that I wrote a poem about it. It went like this:

I threw my trumpet off the bridge  
Into the rocks below  
The salt will ruin her shiny skin  
The sand will close her throat

The hour will come when I shall want  
To kiss her once again  
By then the sea will have her sure  
To purge away her sin

She was a lustful woman  
Who lured me with her flesh  
I met her in a nightclub  
She led me to my death

I'll drive on back to Monterey

I'll give myself to God  
I'll sleep inside my pick-up cab  
Inside a soundless calm

They'll be no more of music  
Of women, cheap and proud  
Of dirty smoke-filled nightclubs  
The jazz, the air, the sound

Oh Jesus, is this what you want  
To drown my fiery song  
To kill my shiny trumpet  
Sacrifice it to the fog

Or could it be that you have given  
Music as a gift  
A sound, a breath, a beating  
A note, a song, a riff

In those days I felt as if I were spiritually tied with Tom in some way. We talked a lot about religion and metaphysics together, we both eventually got involved with evangelical Christianity, and we both heavily lusted after the same woman. These similarities were in addition to our both being musicians and playing in the same band -- the Monterey Peninsula big band. This was where we also did our lusting after Nicole Osborne-Smith, an alto player who could read well but had a thin sound. Tom played the jazz chair in the trumpet section and I played the bass.

The metaphysics and religion we used to discuss centered around the Bible, people like Kahil Gilbran, and our both having read *The Autobiography of a Yogi*. We would talk about the pantheistic vs. the autonomous God, love vs. judgment, and the death and resurrection of

Christ as a metaphor vs. a cosmic reality. All this while smoking pot, drinking vodka, and ruminating about Nicole Osborne-Smith.

This was back in 1979. A few years later, after we'd both become Christians, I ran into Tom again. He was playing trumpet and singing some back-up for this all white soul band. They were pretty good, but their sound was a little too meticulous to really groove. The singer, for instance -- the way he'd sing a James Brown tune was to bend every note just the way it was done on the recording. He got gritty where James had gotten gritty; he shouted where James had shouted.

Anyway, after the band's last set, Tom and I went to get some coffee. That was when he told me the story about these pot demons. He explained to me that, even though he had cleaned up his life quite a bit, he still smoked a lot of marijuana. He added that when he smoked marijuana, he got these visions.

One example he gave was when he went to practice his horn in this underground parking garage. He liked playing there because of the way the sound would bounce off the walls. He claimed that, when he would suddenly stop playing, he could hear angel voices in the echo left hanging in the air and that the angels would tell him what to play next. But then sometimes the angels would really be demons. Then he would become intensely frightened and cry out to Jesus for help.

I asked him, "Why do you put yourself through that? Why do you set yourself up for that kind of freaking out?"

"Because the repenting always brings me peace," he explained. "It's like getting saved over and over again."

To intentionally sin by getting himself stoned and envisioning demons for the sole purpose of then repenting seemed odd, even to me. I didn't know what to say.

Since then, Tom seems to show up in my life every five years or so. Either I run into him or I hear stories about him from friends. Each time it's like looking into a mirror at this more intense version of myself. I've also heard that he has quit playing a few times more, each time finding a new way to destroy his horn and each time miraculously being given a new one so he can continue playing for his angels and demons in the parking garage. Continually making his sacrifice, I suppose.