

SONG OF THE DAY

C

SPECIAL EDITION VI – BRINGING ORDER TO THE FRAY

As I sit here and reflect back on when this journey first began, it amazes me that 15 years have passed. As I look through many of the first Songs Of The Day I sometimes find myself wishing there was a reset button.

To anyone who wasn't on Digital Graffiti, the original mailing list for Led Zeppelin when I first began this project, I realize that some of the intros just don't make any sense. Suffice to say... you had to be there. So please accept my sincere apologies if you're reading one of these and find yourself thinking; What the hell is he going on about?

It might be appropriate to provide an explanation as to why it has taken longer to write about the music of Led Zeppelin than the band was actually a working unit. Over the years there have been numerous personal incidents in my life that were quite draining, including a massive Federal lawsuit against a former employer who actually attempted to end my life. As odd as that may sound, it is, sadly, the devastating truth. The lawsuit took nearly 10 years and unless you've ever been engaged in a legal action of this nature, then you just cannot begin to comprehend how much of a strain it is on the mind as well as the body.

Another major factor in this taking such an extended period of time is because of the loss of three very key people in my life who shared my passion for the music and the magic that was Led Zeppelin.

My best friend in high school was named Geoff. He and I lived and breathed everything Zep related. He went with me on the nearly nine hour drive from Kansas City to Denver to see Robert on his first solo tour and he was there with me in Wichita on 2 March 1985 when we saw The Firm for their second US show ever. He was also by my side when we saw Jimmy in 1988 from roughly the fifth row and then later that night when we met him.

Susan Hedrick, noted Zep authority, actually sent me a photo she took of our meeting Jimmy, and Geoff was in that photo. It was funny... Geoff and I used to argue over whether or not the group should reunite. He was all for it. I, on the other hand, was firmly in the Robert Plant camp and felt that Zeppelin had done it correctly when they disbanded after the premature departure of John Bonham.

We would go back and forth over this debate, each arguing his point, and I always felt very comfortable that they would not do the whole, cheesy reunion thing that so many bands fell into. Then, in late 1994, we heard news that Jimmy and Robert were back together and that MTV would be airing a special show featuring their new band.

The evening of the performance, Geoff came to my house and we watched it together. I was relieved that it was being billed as Page/Plant, so the name Led Zeppelin was still safely intact, and Geoff was excited to see the two of them sharing a stage together again. In some small way, it was a win-win situation.

Just a few months later, the Page/Plant tour was announced and of course we purchased tickets. The date for the show here in Kansas City was 5 May. Cinco de Mayo! Geoff was so looking forward to this show. He was more excited than I think he'd ever been about a concert and we were making plans to try and meet Jimmy again as well as Robert.

But fate stepped in and turned everything in my world upside down. On 2 April 1995, my best friend Geoff was killed by a drunk driver. For the driver it was his fifth arrest for driving drunk and yet he spent all of nine months in jail. I remember going to the hearing for the kid who killed my friend and I was mad as hell and I was going to unleash that fury on this kid. This was not too long after they passed the law that allowed family and friends to have their chance to be heard at hearings such as this, where an innocent person was killed by someone who was ignorant, negligent and intoxicated.

I walked into the courthouse that day filled with a tremendous rage and as I sat during the main part of the hearing, my eyes were burning into the back of this kid's head, part of me believing that if I stared long enough and hard

enough it would cause him immense pain. Finally the judge asked if any family members wanted to talk. Geoff's mom, Judi... my second mother for all intents and purposes, said she had a few words to say.

She took the stand and read aloud a letter she had written to Geoff, basically updating him on what was happening in all of our lives and letting him know that we all loved him and would never forget him.

Then she turned to face the kid. She was calm on the outside but I can only imagine what she must have been feeling on the inside.

She looked this kid in the face... this kid who had killed her son... and she forgave him. She told him she hoped that he would take this opportunity to turn his life around because it would be a terrible tragedy if two lives ended because of this incident.

I remember sitting in the courtroom, all of the anger just being swept away from me; tears streaming down my face. I was witness to the most beautiful and passionate display of humanity that anyone could ever hope to see. Judi had been placed into the most difficult position a mother could ever be put in and she in turn acted with such elegance and grace that everyone was awed and dumbfounded.

I never took the stand that day and I thank God to this day that I didn't. I would not have been as gracious and forgiving as Judi had.

The second person that I lost is, thankfully, still alive. She lives on the East Coast and I first came to know her when she was very young. Though we were separated by many miles and quite a few years, we had a connection that was very powerful.

We shared a love for Zeppelin and Pink Floyd and she never failed to make me smile. This was in the days before cell-phones... or at least, before I had a cell-phone... and I remember the monthly phone bills being massive because we would talk for hours. She was always quite keen on turning me onto new music, or sometimes, very old music.

She had a very vivacious spirit about her and she was an especially beautiful young lady as well. In 2002 I flew to New York and we spent a few precious days there, seeing as many sites as we could fit in and just hanging out. I believe it was 2006 when I last spoke to her. She had a good job, was doing well and seemed happy. It is my sincerest wish that that be true for her, because she is one of those special people that we come across so rarely over the course of our lives.

The third person is also a female and she and I were very close for a brief period of time. She understood my love for Zeppelin - she got it! She in fact was probably an even bigger fan than I was, if that were even possible.

We saw Page/Plant in 1998 together and after the show I remember us standing on a balcony at the hotel, looking out over the city, and just quietly chatting away about the concert, life... and the future. Sadly, things ended soon after that for various reasons and we each went our separate ways. A year or so ago I stumbled upon a way to get in touch with her and I wrote her a very sweet and somewhat brief letter.

It had been 12 years since we last had any contact, but I was happy to be able to write her and try to catch up. She never did respond. She made it abundantly clear that she didn't want any contact with me nor did she want me to contact her. That is such a sad way to leave things with someone you were once very close to. Life is so short and so precious and we only have a blink of an eye here on this planet... I try to not have any burned bridges in my rear view mirror... but I can't control what others do; only what I do.

It's funny, as I am writing about her the song "Going To California" from the "BBC Sessions" is playing. This was a song that had special meaning for us. You put your iTunes on shuffle and things like this happen. Life is indeed rather peculiar.

So... back to my point as to why this has taken so many years to write... when you have three very special people in your life and you share that common bond with them, and then, for different reasons they are gone, it made listening to Zeppelin painful for me. Just too many memories would surface and most of them would lead to the sadness associated with their departure

from my life. After a while, I just stopped listening to Zeppelin altogether.

This past month is the first time in years that I have actually listened to them. And I discovered something - listening to them has been fun again. It's brought back some very good memories and yes, there are some painful ones still there, but I also realize that life is just that; good and bad; happy and sad. It's not always perfect and sometimes people enter our lives and are there for just a brief period, then they move on. The key is to remember them well and cherish those few wonderful moments you had with them.

Over the past 15 years there have been a number of people who I have met and who have been very loyal to me. In my life, there are two things that I value the most; loyalty and trust. I've had far too many people who I thought were my friends who ended up not being what they claimed to be. When your "friends" lie to you and tell others lies about you, it forces you to put a wall up and distance yourself from engaging in relationships because you've experienced too much pain in the past. In that way, I fully understand Roger Waters and The Wall.

There are a few people that I would like to thank. Over the years they have been tremendous friends, they have showed their loyalty and they've always been honest with me. And after some of my experiences, what these friendships mean to me is greater than they will ever truly understand.

The first person I want to thank is Jeremy Mixer. I first met Jeremy on Digital Graffiti back in November 1996. I am smiling from ear to ear as I write this because Jeremy always would post the most passionate, detailed thoughts and ideas on Zeppelin and he would always have a TON of typos in his posts. It became a running joke on the board. Now, the sad thing is, all of us understood exactly what he was saying, even if it was a new language he was inventing on the fly.

It is now 2011 and when I am writing - I am currently working on three books - but what often happens with me is my brain is working faster than my fingers can type. I am not a "typist" by any stretch. I use the index finger on my left hand and right hand to type. Yes... I peck! And I am not very accurate.

So I make many mistakes. Fortunately my Firefox and Word catch all of my mistakes and I am able to go back and correct them. But what happens is I will have some ingenious idea cruising through my head and I will screw up, forcing me to stop and retrace my tracks to correct the mistake, and I find myself getting very agitated because I worry that I will lose the thought in my mind.

This only leads to me getting more and more frustrated and thus, making more mistakes. Eventually, I have to remind myself to calm down and to slow down. It is during those times that I will remember Jeremy and I will smile. The King Of Typos should be proud to know that his legacy lives on with me to this day still.

I remember back in 2002 and Jeremy was working as a DJ at his local radio station. I phoned him out of the blue and requested he play Robert Plant's "I Cried" from the Manic Nirvana album. He informed that he had just played some Plant, but that he would try to get it on the next evening. That is when I informed him that it was me calling. He freaked out! He got all excited and started asking how I was, what I was doing, etc. And then... he played my song.

Now this may seem trivial to most of you, but the song was intended for a special young lady and the fact that he played it meant the world to me. Never mind the fact that I was some 1,500 miles from the radio station... he played it, she heard it and all was well in the world for a few precious moments.

In 1997 Jeremy and I met face to face in Buffalo, NY at the 1997 Led Zeppelin Convention. He was everything I envisioned him being. He was, in fact, exactly as I thought he would be. He had a tremendous amount of energy and was like a Zeppelin encyclopedia. We were hanging out in a room listening to a bootleg from some early era show, and when Jimmy goes into the solo Jeremy commented that it sounded eerily close to some other show. I was stunned. He knew their shows so well that he could tell you about a performance in Japan 1972 and how it portrayed echoes of a 1973 show in Copenhagen.

During our time in Buffalo a bunch of us decided to go see Niagara Falls. We crossed over into Canada and went to the

Horseshoe Falls. Eventually we were standing right at the edge of where the water dropped over the side, plunging down into the depths of the Falls. As we were standing around, mostly in awe of the power of the rushing water, suddenly out of nowhere, a huge black thing popped up out of the water just before it dropped over the edge and out of sight.

Jeremy turns to me and we looked at each other and he said, 'Did you just see that black object?' We both burst into laughter. Of course... anyone reading this is probably wondering what is so funny about that... but it's one of those You-had-to-be-there moments. Black Object... Presence... The Obelisk. Perhaps it is something that only a true Zeppelin fan could appreciate.

Over the years, Jeremy has been a great friend. It doesn't matter how much time elapses, when we talk or write to each other, it's like no time has passed at all. So thank you Jeremy, thank you for your friendship, your typos, and your vast knowledge of Zeppelin, for playing a song that meant everything to me and your Black Object comment that made us both laugh. You've been a good friend and I appreciate you very much!

Another person that I first got to know through Digital Graffiti is Theolyn Brock. Over the years she sent me some priceless bootlegs, comforted me when I was at some very low points, encouraged me when I told her I was going to start writing a book, and has always been such an engaging and wonderful spirit that I simply cannot imagine going through life not knowing her.

A couple of years ago I joined the Facebook community and through a mutual friend I saw Theolyn's account. I wrote her... not knowing what to expect as it had been a very long time since we last communicated... but she wrote back and, just as it is with Jeremy, it was like no time had elapsed at all.

She is a wonderful soul and I am honored to know her and call her my friend. She also has the most unique and beautiful name and when I approached her and asked if she would mind if I used her name for a central character in one of my books, she was more than accommodating. So thank you Theolyn, for all the years of friendship and Zeppelin related memories.

I also owe a great debt to Bruce Deerhake. I don't recall who it was that first hit upon the idea of making a website for this Song Of The Day series, but I do recall Bruce being the one to jump in and offer to host the site. That he has kept the site active all these years is something that has meant a lot to me.

Like Theolyn, there were times when I was going through some very rough patches in my life, and Bruce would e-mail me, letting me know he was there, letting me know I didn't have to go through it alone. It was comforting and it's also doubtful that he'll ever truly know how much his friendship has meant to me over the years.

His extreme patience with me has also been valued and is another thing that he may feel has been taken for granted, but trust me Bruce, it hasn't.

I have been blessed to have been born with a very good memory and there are so many things that you have done for me, things you have sent me, times when you were there for me and I want you to know that I remember them all.

So... thank you so very much Bruce for all that you have done. Your friendship, trust, and loyalty have meant the world to me.

I also want to give thanks to Rainn. When the SOTD site was put up, she created some very beautiful graphics to enhance the site. I was absolutely blown away when I first saw what she had created, and today, all these years later, when I go to the page, her beautiful work still takes my breath away.

It has been 10... perhaps 11 years, since I last spoke with her, but if you should see this Rainn, know that I am so deeply touched that you created this beautiful logo for the site. I hope that all with you is well!

I would be remiss to not mention Pouya. We met at the 1997 Zeppelin convention and hit it off immediately. He's a class act and I miss him dearly. If anyone knows where Pouya is, please have him contact me. I'd like to catch up with my friend.

And lastly... I must give thanks to the five guys who have made all of this possible. Of course, I am referring to the

members that made up the team that was Led Zeppelin. To Peter Grant, Jimmy Page, John Paul Jones, Robert Plant and the greatest drummer in rock history, the power-house that was John Henry Bonham.

Your music has been the soundtrack to my life. I've been blessed to meet three of you and each of you was the most sincere and nicest any person could ever hope to meet. Thank you for 12 years of amazing albums and concerts and a lifetime of music. When it came to bands, you guys did it all; from the beauty in your music to the mysteriousness that permeated your every move.

You taught us lessons along the way... {Upon us all, a little rain must fall} and you gave us hope... {In the light, you will find the road...}. You produced some of the most intense music and some of the most tranquil music as well. Nobody... and I mean NOBODY... could do it like you guys.

Thank you to every single person who has ever taken the time out of their life to sit down and read any of these writings. I know how valuable your time is, and the fact that you took your time to read something I wrote has meant the world to me.

Until the next time... ever onward!

Jeff