

REQUIEM TO A DUMB BLONDE

I expect everybody's had their own TK, pending on when they met her and which 'her' it was they met. My own take on TK harkens back to the spring of 1970, my first year on the faculty at UCLA after 10 years as a perennial grad-student. I was walking on the beach in Venice zonked out of my gourd on a sweet batch of acid, when I bumped into this dumb-blonde-looking chick in jeans and tight sweater--she was practically spilling out of it and there was lots to spill--sitting at an open-air hippie café right on the boardwalk. We wound up having breakfast and it was a mind-blower, I couldn't tell for sure whether it was the acid or the lady was funning me.

She said she had just quit her tenure-track job in philosophy at U Mizou in Columbia to do another PhD in psych at UCLA. Said she grew up in KC, said her dissertation was on **C.S. Peirce**, a rare in-group specialty in those days. It turned out she knew about my teacher-cum-nemesis **Noam Chomsky**, with whom I had had growing issues ever since the summer of 1966. She explained, eyes sparkling benevolently, how it was all in the faulty epistemology--there were not just the two extremes, Aristotle and Plato (or Descartes, Chomsky's stand-in for Plato). There was also the middle way--pragmatics, Kant and Peirce. That Swede-Suomi dumb blonde blew my mind sky high right there and then.

The 1960s being what they were, we wound up in bed. Tho not before I got her high on the weed. Her eyes went double-wide, she turned into an innocent child, this dumb blonde on her way to a double PhD. She proceeded to tell me about **Kara**, whom I soon met and fell in love with. And **Tommy**, from whom she had just split. His dissertation, she said, was on **Bertrand Russell**, another heavyweight that took me years to fathom. She didn't believe in non-amicable separation, she said; Tommy was a dear friend, she was working on him to quit his post in Missouri and join the revolution in LA. The sixties, just ended, were still in full bloom in Middle America. California was an irresistible magnet, siphoning in the restless souls of Middle America, who were quitting their safe havens in droves to flock to the Coast. My ex had split to Aspen with my boy Christopher, I was just starting my life-long commute between the Coast and the Rockies.

She also told me about her **dad** and **Aila**, whom I met years later. Her dad was an old-line Marxist and labor organizer, harkening back to the old country and its Syndicalist tradition. No way of understanding TK's politics without remembering her dad. And Aila was a sweetheart, I could see her smile on Kara's lips. Forty years later I finally met another Aila right here in Colorado. Boy do I love those Finnish vowels.

Before I knew it, she dragged me to a meeting of a wild underground, the **Elephant Theory Group**, where I met more crazy people who turned my intellectual life upside down forever. **Ed Sadalla**, **Kalyn Roberts**, his artist wife **Ruthie**, bearded **Jay Dowling**. We met at Kalyn's house two blocks from my shack on Beverly Avenue in **Ocean Park**. At the start of each meeting we smoked the sacrament, Kalyn being a grand connoisseur. Of whiskey too, alas. Everything was on the table--psychology, philosophy, language, art, life--no topic was out of bounds and relevance was never an issue. As TK explained, preparing me for the shock, relevance was just another hobgoblin of small minds.

Of course, it was too good to last. Kalyn drank himself out of tenure. Like most perfectionists, he had a serious writer's block. We did an experiment together; sweet results, iffy stats, but he couldn't write up his part. It set a life-long pattern for my collaboration with psychologists--I would design the language stimuli, their RAs would run the experiments, do the stats. The stimuli were always too complex, it turned out, and the stats barely borderline. No reputable editor, I was patiently told, would publish results with such ungainly stats. Then Jay decamped, then Ed, to greener pastures in Arizona. Now I was spending more and more time in Colorado, between the ranch on **the Rez** and Christopher in Aspen.

TK puzzled us most with her move to **Rand** and applied research. Here was a prime, supple theoretical mind who could write her ticket to a top academic job anywhere, burying herself in boring real-world issues. What a waste of a mind, we thought. But she said she'd had enough of theory, she wanted to do something meaningful in the real-world. Her father's voice speaking.

Many a time when, after a heroic struggle, I came to her with a conceptual epiphany, she smiled sweetly: "Oh, I was wondering how long it would take you". She wasn't beyond arrogance, a professional hazzard, but was incredibly sweet about it.

She had a most generous idea about love: share and share alike. This was before she came to terms, reluctantly, with how smaller minds could inflict spectacular collateral damage in the fields of Eros. When we were together, we struggled mightily over her amatory inclusivity. I thought she took the Sixties much too literally. She said I was having a hard time with my macho genes. Eventually I conceded, writing an extravagant note to her--she never saw it--in my copy of Alan Watts' "Nature, Man and Woman". It was excised years later, alas. It turned out we were both right, but by then I was mostly away, in Colorado and then Oregon.

We kept lamenting the distance but never lost touch. As with my other Sixties friends, scattered all over the map, the bond never snapped. Tommy came over for our wedding on the ranch in 1978 with his Hawaii lily, Winnie, joining the Yin-Yang circle of witnesses under the perfectly-round juniper tree. As with Ed, rare reunions merely reaffirmed that we had never parted. Two weeks before TK's shocking demise, she sent me a note about my latest novel "Downfall of a Jesuit", (a lurid sex-scandal in 18th-Century France). She loved it, she said, it reminded her of her Medievalist training, Aquinas, Abelard, Occam *et al*. She was just ready to trade it to Tommy for my Rez novel "Blood".

I've never left, TK. You haven't either. We had a lot of forgivable illusions in the Sixties, we thought we could change the world, but the world turned out to be most recalcitrant. At the very least, tho, we may have managed to change ourselves. And we may have left a lasting sediment, I see the spark in our kids' eyes--Kara and Chris and Nate and Jed Karim. Just enough so that the world may be a bit easier to bear; and that the words of our romantic prophets may still resound across the land, **Bobby's** "Love is all there is, it makes the world go round"; and **Paul's** "And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make". I still take this silly axiom quite literally. I thought you did too, TK.

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