

Herland

VOICE

July, 2001

DEATH OF A DRUG DEALER

By Margaret Cox

June 19, 2001. I've been thinking about my friend Thurman all day. I miss him. We were unlikely friends, but good ones. When we first got to know each other, in Los Angeles, Venice Beach and Hollywood in the early seventies, I was a clueless young white woman in my early thirties, with a handsome black husband and precious small daughter; and Thurman was a beautiful, brilliant, brash young black man in his mid-twenties, with a drop-dead gorgeous wife, Pam, who gave him fits all their lives together. We went into business, the four of us: bright, attractive, energetic young people; and we came this *close* to being fabulously successful. Oh well.

Thurman had an entrepreneurial soul which Henry Ford would have admired, and a work ethic that even Oklahomans, proud as we are of ours, could only aspire to. He and I, truth to tell, did a little more than our share of the work in our businesses - though the others did their part - my husband was the brilliant-idea man, and Thurman's wife served just by stimulating and aggravating us and keeping our blood running high. Still, Thurman - "T", we called him - and I were the workhorses.

In our best, longest-running venture, we made trendy denim shoulder bags, embroidered and bejeweled. If you are old enough, Reader, you probably owned one. You may own it still, as they were of good quality, well made. *(continued inside)*

NEED A WARM FUZZY?

Then again, don't we need all the warm fuzzies we can get? In a burst of civic pride, the OKC Metro-Women's Chorus is presenting a whole evening of nothing but fuzzies on July 14. Epworth United Methodist Church, 1901 N. Douglas (two blocks west of Classen Blvd.), will again host the annual Metro-Women's summer concert at 7:00 p.m. in the church sanctuary.

"We'll be singing about the all the different kinds of good feelings we can find," said Music Director Don Clothier. "We'll tell you about the Rainbow Connection, and what's over that rainbow. There will be discourse on how much warmer love is than Steam Heat, and we'll take away all your worries with 'Hakuna Matata', just like Simba, Timon and Pumbaa."

Tickets will be \$7.00 in advance from chorus members or at Jungle Red, and \$10.00 at the door. A reception will be held following the concert in the Church's grand hall. □

The Herland Legal Defense Fund and the Social Justice Committee of the First Unitarian Church invite you to attend a concert with

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DEATH OF A DRUG DEALER

(Continued from page 1)

We were perhaps the only small manufacturing business in downtown LA which paid legal wages, and even so we were making money and getting orders from across the country. I was the office staff and bookkeeper, and Thurman was the operations supervisor. It was he who used the dangerous-looking jigsaw-like machine that cut the cloth, and he who rescued and bandaged the finger of our chief seamstress when she ran a needle through it; and he who almost threw up afterwards, and gave everyone in the small plant an immediate raise.

Still, as is so often the case, while labor toiled, management had a lot of time to sit in the little office, wonder offhand what our spouses were up to and if we cared, and talk. Sometimes we talked about our friends and families, and the people we knew who were getting deeper and deeper into drug dependency; but mostly we talked about ourselves. Thurman told me a story one day that he had never told anyone else, neither his wife nor my husband; I think one reason he became so fond of me was that I never told anyone else either. He wouldn't mind now.

A few years before, he said, he and a friend had conceived a wondrous business plan: it would make money for them and be of great benefit to their customers; it was a truly fine business venture; wasn't America wonderful to offer these great opportunities? There was, in an area just south of Hollywood, a large neighborhood filled mostly with retirees with healthy savings – in other words, old people with plenty of discretionary money to help them pay for chores which their bodies were a little too old for. My friend T and his partner arranged with the major grocery stores in the area to deliver groceries, and sent out a first-class mailing to *over five thousand homes*, offering, for a small percentage of the overall tab, to pick up and deliver groceries to these old people's doors. Years later, telling me about it, T's mortification was as evident as if it were fresh: they received no – zero – zip - not one - return card or phone call asking them for even more information, let alone requesting service...

Still, Thurman persevered. He almost made it with our purse business. We had so many orders that we were thinking expansion. As luck had it, however, it turned out to be the year of the Boll Weevil. That little pest created a world-wide cotton shortage, meaning we couldn't get any denim, so we couldn't meet our orders. We tried to adapt, but we couldn't, and we went under.

When that business folded, the partnership did also, and I didn't see a lot of Thurman anymore. Still, we were always very glad when we did run into each other. Besides his obvious pleasure, his warm and brotherly smile and kiss, he would always, with quite some reverence and solemnity, honor me with a little gift: gravely, he would pull out a tiny spoon and offer me a "one & one".

Now, I really didn't want it. A little powder cocaine up my nose never did anything for me, thank the god and goddess, but besides killing a few brain cells it never seemed to hurt me either, so let me assure you, Reader, I accepted this offering.

One little spoonful up one nostril, another up the other – "one & one." It may have been unhealthy, it may have been illegal, but I know a gift from the heart when I see one, and I hope I'll always have the heart myself to accept one when it is offered..

It was a generous gift; cocaine was *huge* in Los Angeles in the seventies, and expensive as all get-out. Maybe it still is, I don't know; we left California in 1978 and settled down in Oklahoma City working 9 to 5's and put that life behind us. We heard a little from and about T from time to time. I knew that he was dealing a little coke for his livelihood, and heard a scary story about him nearly being murdered. But he escaped, and I thought he always would persevere and survive. In his last business he had a limousine service, and if the renters knew the secret word they would find a tray full of magic powder in the back seat for their pleasure.

Pam's call came in the middle of the night. Thurman was gone, dead. Someone, a dealer maybe, – had my friend run into a cocaine-style Boll Weevil and been unable to get his money together? – had burst into his apartment and shot him in the head. The 911 operator had it on tape, T telling the gunman, No, Don't...

I guess this was twenty years ago. I'm old, so it feels like yesterday.

Over the last twenty years, I have heard more people than I care to remember say that the people they really *think* deserve the death penalty are the drug dealers. Wait!, I have to tell them, No! That's just wrong! My friend Thurman, my pal, my confidante, my cohort, my buddy, was a "drug dealer"; and yet, he was also a hardworking, kind, gentle man who tried his very best to make an "honest" living. And what, indeed, should he have found so "dishonest" about selling and dealing in a commodity which everyone he knew partook of? Leave hypocrisy behind, and was his business so different from any other? Should we kill the drug dealer while we elect his customer President?

Thurman was shot and he died and was buried, and those who knew him and loved him grieved and mourned. Although, a sanctimonious horde says: good riddance. And today, June 19, 2001, in Terre Haute, Indiana, our government killed a drug dealer named Juan Raul Garza, a man whom I'm betting would have made a good friend to most of us. I know that he had a family who loved him. I will take the government's word

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that he killed and ordered others killed. If Thurman had lived this long, would he have killed too? Would he have aspired to be a "drug kingpin", and done what the job seemed to require?

I don't know. We'll never know; and I am sickened by thinking of it, and heartsick at the killing. But I'm sorry, America, I feel my blame pointing towards our way of life, towards hard-core, laissez-faire capitalism, towards intractable racism and to a "war on drugs" that has no value, no achievable goal and which does incalculable harm. I see my dear African-American friend Thurman turning to drugs for his living, and for his dying; and see Hispanic-American Juan Raul Garza being executed for things he did as a drug dealer.

At the vigil for Mr. Garza this morning what keeps coming to my mind is an old car I used to tool around town in, my little fireball-orange Ford Pinto. I'm lucky, because my Pinto never turned into a real fireball; but had I been one of the many immolated in a Pinto on account of *reversibly bad design, what then?* My heirs - some cold comfort to me, I'll tell you, - might have made a few hundred thousand dollars, but meanwhile I'd be gruesomely dead - and *what about those Ford Pinto executives who decided that it would be more cost-effective to pay a bunch of wrongful-death suits than to correct the faulty design?* I guess they are all on death row, too, awaiting their date with the Mad Needler.

I'm sorry, what's that you say? You say that those intentional, deliberate, coldly criminal executives are proud citizens with huge incomes living with the warm respect of their offspring, their peers and the criminal court system? It makes me sick.

Today we executed Juan Raul Garza. He died a drug dealer. Thurman Brooms, a hard working, loving father, husband and generous friend, believed the American dream and lived it until his death; and he died a drug dealer. I stand here in vigil at the Jesus Wept statue and mourn the deaths of Thurman Brooms and of Juan Raul Garza. Let us end it now. Stop the Hate. Stop the Violence. Moratorium Now! Abolition Now! □

IN REVIEW

by Jill Garner

I don't buy a lot of music by so-called mainstream country artists, but a friend of mine gave me Trisha Yearwood's latest CD and it got me thinking. There are a few mainstream artists whose CDs I do buy, often because they have great voices, but largely because I think they are good at choosing songwriters. Some of them sing songs by some of my favorite songwriters, and it makes me more interested in them. Yeah, they do their fair share of fluff stuff for the radio, but they also might have on their CD a song by Kim Richey, or Cheryl Wheeler. It makes me appreciate their talent a little bit more.

There is not much disputing that Trisha Yearwood has a nice voice. It doesn't give me goose bumps or anything but I love the deep smoothness of her voice, and on this latest CD, she shows she can hit some of the higher notes too!

I own three of her CDs. *Thinkin' About You* I purposefully sought out because of the song "On a Bus to St. Cloud." The song was written by Gretchen Peters ("Independence Day," "The Secret of Life," "Like Water Into Wine") who definitely has a talent for writing some hit songs. She's also a co-writer on the title song for Yearwood's latest CD, *Inside Out*. Yearwood also likes Matraca Berg a lot and has recorded several of her songs, one of the most popular being "XXX's and OOO's (An American Girl)." Kim Richey is one of my very favorite singers and songwriters and Yearwood is also a big fan. She's recorded several songs written by her, as well as Melissa Etheridge's "You Can Sleep While I Drive" and Roseanne Cash's "Seven Year Ache."

I do admire her choice of songwriters and musicians. Plus, as an added bonus, she has a recurring role on one of my favorite shows, JAG, as a forensic pathologist and does a great job!

I have to say my favorite of the more popular singers is Suzy Bogguss. I own all her CDs and always look forward to the next one. I think she has a great voice and a great selection of songs.

One of her first big hits, if not the first one, was "Aces," written by the great Cheryl Wheeler. On that same CD, she recorded "Outbound Plane" written by Nanci Griffith and Tom Russell, and "Save Yourself" by Beth Nielson Chapman. On later CDs, she's recorded Cheryl Wheeler's "Don't Wanna" and "Moonlight and Roses", Julie Miller's "Take me Back," Kim Richey's "From Where I Stand," "Drive South" and "Lovin' a Hurricane" by John Hiatt, and recorded a CD with the wonderful Chet Atkins on guitar, who just turned 77 on the day I'm writing this. But I could bore you forever with who wrote what song. Suffice it to say, I'm really pretty happy listening to any of Suzy Bogguss' CDs, and I can't say that about that many people.

Patty Loveless is someone else I really like a lot. I think I only own two of her CDs, but one I never get tired of listening to. *Long Stretch of Lonesome*, one of her less popular CDs, is my favorite. It's easy to find used just about anywhere you can buy used CDs, but don't let that scare you off because it's worth the money and time to find it. She also picked some good songwriters on this CD (Annie Roboff, Gretchen Peters, Kim Richey, Jim Lauderdale) and just some really great songs. "Long Stretch of Lonesome", written by Gary Scruggs and Tony Arata, two songwriters whose songs Suzy Bogguss uses a lot, is the song that is truly a gift to her voice. On part of the song, her strong, clear voice belts out and just leaves me speechless. I don't even sing along, I just listen. The CD has several songs that really show off her voice and she's a singer I sit back and pay attention to.

And last but not least, is Kathy Mattea. What a gorgeous deep voice. She has stayed true to her vision and and partly as a result, is not selling the billions of CDs she once did. But she also picks great songs and on her latest CD, *The Innocent Years*, she wrote many, if not all of the songs, herself. I have not bought the CD yet but I plan to soon. I love her previous CD, *Love Travels*, where she recorded songs by Gillian Welch, Cheryl Wheeler, Jim Lauderdale, and a song written by her husband Jon Vezner and Janis Ian! □

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