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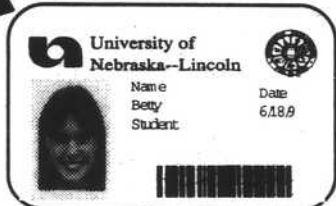


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Mark Baldrige's  
How I Spent My  
Summer Vacation



Episode 8

# I've Weened the light

Concert proves to be a healing experience

MARK BALDRIDGE is a senior English major.

The night before I saw Ween a woman I had never met before told me the one about the guy who lost everything but the Porsche:

Seems this guy was moving across country in a rental van, towing his Porsche behind, when the truck caught fire (this point in the story is a little vague) and all his earthly possessions were destroyed.

The fire also severed the towing link and the Porsche, cut free on level ground, was discovered some miles behind, sitting peacefully, waiting.

Since the fire was due to a flaw in the van itself, the company paid our hero off, leaving him with a large sum of cash and his fancy car.

The story kind of begs a moral, or at least a moral response. Like you are expected to say, either, "How terrible!" or "At least he had the Porsche." Or even something like — and this is crucial — "I'd take the money and drive to Vegas!"

As if, somehow, being cut loose from one's whole life, being bought off by some embarrassed megacorp, would be a good thing, if only you had a nice enough set of wheels to go with the carefree lifestyle.

"Me," I said, "I'd take the money and drive to wherever Ween were playing."

The morning

before I saw Ween, I woke up a trifle deaf in one ear. I was not alarmed — it'd been happening to me intermittently for a couple weeks — but I was concerned with being able to hear at the concert that evening.

I had shelled out 16 bucks I could ill afford for a sold-out show that would be my first national act since I saw They Might Be Giants in 1992 in Columbus, Ohio, and I'd be damned if I was gonna let any old ear keep me from hearing in stereo.

I'd previously flushed them with warm water — no potatoes growing in my cochlea, thank you. I'd tried soaking, I'd tried scrubbing but I still couldn't hear.

"Fluid behind the eardrum," a wizened old gnome of a retiree physician had intoned. "Try an antihistamine."

I had tried antihistamines, diuretics and ignoring the problem for days on end but nothing at all had worked.

But this morning, of all mornings, I was more determined and I brought out the big guns:

Alka-seltzer Cold Relief Medicine. Ever had it? A dangerous chemical, no doubt. Plop, plop, it says. Fizz, fizz. And you are supposed to swallow that?

Who wants to consume some noisy concoction?

Though I did not take the nighttime formula (a one-way ticket to lullaby land akin to cold-pressed morphine) I did make the mistake of drinking a beer some 8 hours later.

When the inevitable zombification set in, I was only two or three hours away from seeing Ween.

In the hours before I saw Ween, I

explored the increasingly crowded warrens of The Royal Grove with mounting anxiety. It's a funky place, the Grove, and I don't mean funky down in the soul.

I mean funky smellin'.

But I'm pretty comfortable in the funk and I don't think that would have done it. I mean, what was this sudden cold chill of fear that had begun to sink beneath my placid withdrawal.

Could it be, was it, that after all these years I was afraid of Ween? Or of the half-naked teenagers who in the heat and crowd and stink had begun to chant, shaking fists like under-age terrorists, "Ween! Ween! WEEN!"

Was it the noise, the heat, the storm building outside, electricity in the air?

The band hit the stage and I confess that, though Gene and Dean and all the rest of them came out, guns blazing, still I was just a little wrapped up in my insulation. Shock maybe.

I looked down from my balcony seat and the crowd was writhing ... or was that just a trick of the hellish heat?

The bull-necked security team tossed water and ice on the steaming dancers, threw crowd surfers violently to the floor and hustled them away.

And the rock-gods-who-are Ween tore through country tunes, ripped R&B riffs, tagged the funky rhythms and spouted the mad gibberish for which they are so rightly revered.

And looking down, I felt suddenly happy, wide awake in the surround-sound.

With the power of their music, Ween had torn through the insulation, cracked the carapace isolating me in the crowd.

Burned me to the ground and left me standing, dazed and bemused, by the souped-up automobile of their indescribable music.

I could hear again; I was healed.

"Yeah! Yeah! Yeah!" I shouted, my voice lost in the careening Ween.



MATT HANEY/DN