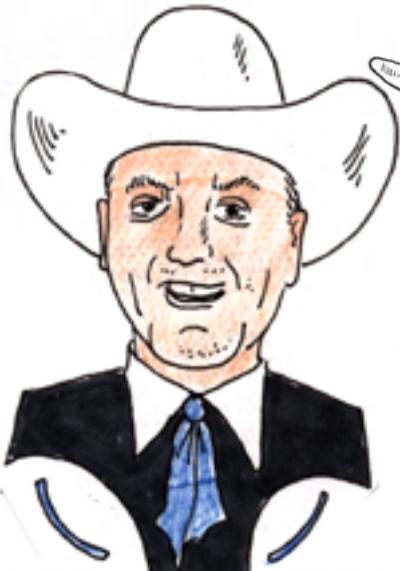


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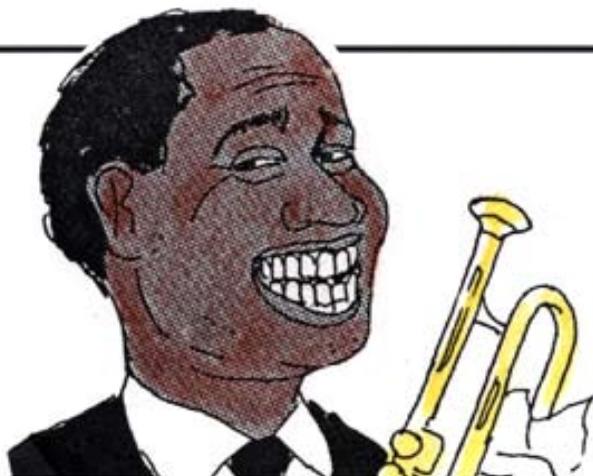
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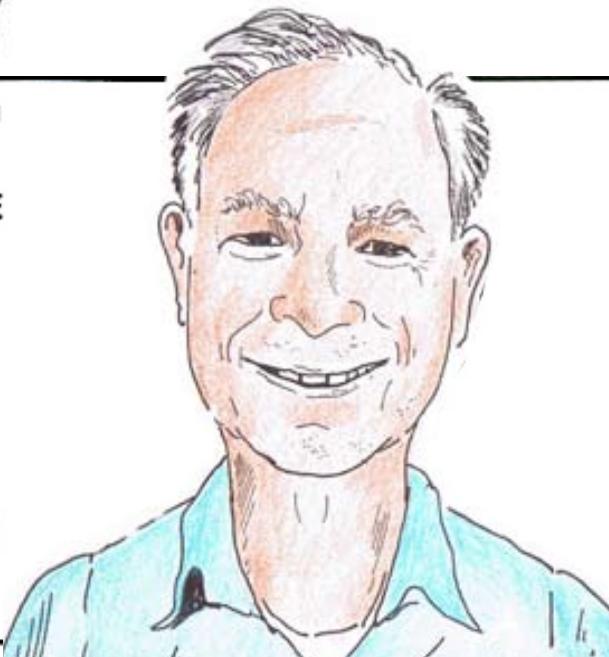
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POINTBLANK CRUISING

allan greenwood

Behind me the sun sets creating a magnificent fluorescent orange swath across the western sky as it begs for one last bit of attention before kissing this plateau good night. Unfortunately for his immature attempt at preventing his inevitable bedtime, all I see in my rearview mirror is dust, which only allows the passage of color devoid of fluorescence and certainly no magnificence. There have been times when I slammed on the brakes and jumped out to take in its last gasp of brilliance, but not this evening. I am barely in control of my vehicle and blaring music has stunned my sense of esthetics.

As the sun sets the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band commands my attention, except for those brief moments when my vehicle careens and threatens to leave what little of road that exists. Throughout the years they have accompanied me on many a trip into canyon country. As I race down an almost road to nowhere in particular, I fight the melancholy that comes out of the blue, or in this case the orange, when I realize that years have sped by, are still speeding by and there is no where in particular that I am racing to. I have changed over those years, but tonight I feel if I drive fast enough I can catch up to whatever I have missed along the way that I should have slowed down to experience... Or am I recklessly cruising along with suicidal abandon because of some existential crisis? No. I am driving this way because the music is loud and it feels good to bounce down an almost road in time with the music. I hope they don't play a ballad. If they do, the next thing I know I will be watching the sunset in the peaceful silence of the desert.

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band has changed, too. They have metamorphosed over the years from a bluegrass band with a twinge of rock to a more country western sound. However, they still have a drive beneath them that hints of good old rock and roll.

Normally, I wouldn't be listening to anything resembling country western music, especially when I am already a little depressed. The reason being, and the problem with this genre of music, is that the men are always lamenting about the women that have left them and the resultant loss of a will to live, let alone to be a man. It claims to be true-blue-redneck-tough-guys-in-pickups-with-gun-racks-toting-loaded-guns music, but these singers are just the opposite. The simple loss of a woman has turned them into the biggest bunch of sniveling whiners I have ever heard. And if that isn't bad enough, they sing through their noses.

At least the women are stronger. They have left their nasally, no-good-for-nothing men, but there is a hint of whining in them, too. It used to be that they were at home with a passel of snot-nosed kids while their husbands were either drunk at a honky-tonk bar or in bed with some younger, less haggard woman who hadn't reproduced yet.

Fortunately for them, and unfortunately for their male counterpart, womanhood has discovered birth control and buck knives. They no longer have kids coming out the wazoo to tie them down and a lost husband to sing about. Now all they sing about is an insane desire to castrate the men who has wronged them.

When all worn out, they both sing about God and how Jesus saved them. I would rather listen to a whining male sing about his lost woman or a castrating female sing about the man who soon will be singing in a high whining voice about something else he lost. At least, I know those people exist.

The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band guys might sing about a lost love, but there is no whine to their voices. In fact, there is a sort of lilt. It's as if they hope she doesn't come back, so they have more time to belly up to the bar for another beer.

On the rare occasion when even the Dirt Band sounds a little too country and gives into the peer pressure to almost whine, I turn to that good old boy, Willie Nelson. Now he may sing about lost love, but that is only a metaphor. In reality, the bar has closed and he's run out of whiskey, that is what saddens him. All he has left to turn to is something that, at best, is only a misdemeanor. A couple tokes of that and Willie sounds like he really does miss a woman. Not! Just kidding. Some day I would like to smoke a little dope with Willie, but right now I have to concentrate at thirty miles per hour on a twenty-mile-per-hour almost road. I'm careening again.

I don't know if it is the Dirt Band that makes me want to accelerate or recollections from my youth. There was a time when I was carefree and racing from mountain to mountain, and then finally, to the desert. All I know is that I feel good and the end of this day is perfect.

I am on a four-wheel-drive road, but not the hard-core kind that forces you to crawl along, picking and choosing wheel ruts and bumps. The music to drive along that kind of road would depress me. Instead, I am on a 20 mph road and going 30+ mph. Every once in a while I slam on the brakes a little too late and jolt a kidney. Or I start to fish tail and recall my youth learning to drive on ice and snow in Northern Minnesota. I know I should be going slower, but the music won't let me; it is making me manic.

In addition, there is a wish to escape my age and where it is leading me, to a life of creaky joints that won't bend and aches and pains that make me want to bend. In my future is a mind that will have trouble remembering, and when it does, it will only recall pain. Even the recollections that don't sting now, still hurt a little because they tell of days and people long gone and never to be seen again in this world. For some reason at 30 mph and bouncing off the roof of my vehicle, I don't have the extra time or energy to cry about lost youth. It takes the country western singer out of me.

In my mind at slower speeds, there are people telling me what I should and should not be doing. We grow up, but there is always a parent somewhere. Parents aren't only your mother and father; they are also wives and children and bosses and the government and on and on. Is there anyone who isn't a parent to me, I wonder? At 10+ mph over the safe speed limit, I think I can outrun them... and time...and myself.

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