

Fission Well

"..Tim?.....hi, hon, it's Hel....I'm sorry to bother you. I know you're busy but I just wanted to let you know, Ed and I were watching the news, and there's something going on at that island your band plays at...they're not sure what it is, but something is making people very very sick, a mystery illness... and I just want you to be on the lookout so you don't catch it. You know how we worry so. Well, have great time, but please dear,... be careful. ...Oh, one more thing.....are you getting enough folic acid.? Your mother says you look pale."

That was the first we had heard about. A message from Tim's Aunt Helen.

We were on a short vacation at the time, so none of us, at this point, really knew what was going on. We had two weeks off and hadn't spoken. Not entirely unusual for us. Hell, even when we're working and traveling in the van fifty hours a week, current events aren't on the top of our conversation index. "What do ya think about John Kerry's middle class tax cut platform, Stetter?" usually will take second or third fiddle to "goddamn, you were loud last night, Steve", or "what's that smell in here?" Anyway, as mentioned, at this point the grapevine was barely a seed and was basically an unknown concern.

Then a few E-mails began to roll in. Small in volume at first, but only taking days to snowball as the story hit national headlines. "You guys will still be there, right?" or "despite what's going on, please tell me guys will still play" was the general theme of the questions we received. At the this point we were still clueless, so our reply was always a sincere but confused "yes", fearing Steve's endless consumption of beef and shrimp at Tipper's may have finally jeopardized our tenure on the island.

It was Tim who called that Tuesday. We were all now comfortably back from our hiatus and we needed to touch base and coordinate the journey to the Beer Barrel. We were to leave on Thursday.

He made the same phone call four times, as the attempt at a five way conference call was aborted when we were unable to recall Steve's phone number. *Use it or write it down...*we reminded ourselves, *use it or write it down.....*He called Brandon first.

"Hey, Ryan" Tim warned, "There's a lot of sick people up in Put-in-Bay."

"Thank God" the drummer replied.

"I mean they're throwing up all over the place. There's puke everywhere!"

Yes, Brandon thought to himself; now tell me something harder to believe..... like eggs come in shells.

"That's great, Tim" Brandon continued, "we like 'em with a good buzz, don't we?" subconsciously fearing the ridicule of a sober crowd.

"No, ya moron, it's in the water...there's something in the water....mystery illness.....shit, I'll talk to ya later. I got some calls to make."

We were all on time Thursday, now aware of the situation as we began to load our gear into the van.

"I hope you guys took my advice and brought your own water," Tim questioned, straining as he loaded his ten gallon jug behind the back seat.

"I sure did, Goldie" answered Steve, a tad more frugal, a red six ounce thermos gripped in his hand.

"I ain't scared of no germs" John said through his surgical mask, now driving separately, an Evian ice machine hitched to his Jeep. Our Voyager pulled out minutes later; our fingers crossed and our compass north.

It was four days later on Sunday. As we converged in our dressing room before the show as we always do, it was clear we weren't looking good. Jimi entered first, drawing immediate attention. His body was weak and sagging, his bicep now resting on his wrist. Brandon's agony was also apparent. His slow, straddled gait obviously indicating he spent more hours on the throne than a full box of Puffs. Steve's eyes were glassy, his speech staggered and confusing. Our concern soon intensified as John came in with Tim, his body at a right angle, tile grout embedded in his palms. Tim seemed to hold up the best by comparison, although his shaking, yellow flesh looked weird in the fluorescent lights. Our intro song was engaged, and we crawled towards the stage.

The next day as we drove to the ferry and discussed the weekend, we all agreed that there was actually some good news about our sickly, tired condition.

None of us caught that damn illness.