

The Meaning of Life, The Universe, and Everything, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Loving "Big" Tim Guthrie.

By Timothy Braun
(Why is Tim writing in Gabriel's Blog?)

I met Tim Guthrie, the bombastic gonzo mixed media artist, in a rural mansion dropped between lakes and mountains and streams in northern New York State last summer. Guthrie is a mammoth man in both heart and stature, able to wrestle eight plates of Korean barbeque to his stomach, drink seven mugs of espresso, and burn a newly found amigo six albums from the likes of Black Rebel Motorcycle Club to Blonde Redhead all before it is time for whiskey pudding and a nightcap. He has the heart of a saint, the brain of a devil, and the laugh of Barney Rubble. His artwork is that of a rude, crude wizard of wonder: political, thought provoking, and subtle all at the same time.

Guthrie, like myself, excels at causing trouble, most notably calling the 43rd President of these United States a "liar" in public, before it was cool to do so. Guthrie committed this violation of red state statute at a Bush rally. In our circle of friends we have become known as Big Tim and Little T, or Venti and Grande Tim. And I ate a lamb burger with him in the heart of Omaha on his 42nd birthday.

Tim Guthrie is from Omaha, a graduate of Creighton University where he is now tenured faculty. He's lived in Nevada, Idaho, Montana, and traveled extensively across Europe. But Omaha is clearly his home. He lives in a German style apartment building with his wife Beth and their new exercise machine know as the "octane." Tim is a throat slitter, a fire starter, a mercenary, a hooligan, and illuminati in the war against mediocrity, as mediocrity is the greatest sin. He creates yellow ribbon bumper stickers reading "Love to Follow Blindly", animated epitaphs of Oppenheimer and his bomb that turned sand in to glass and Japan into Hell, and portraits of old friends as kings. His artwork is a kiss to the brain and a cowboy kick to the heart. I had grand dreams for his birthday, imagining all the trouble we could get into. We would need lawyers, bags of money, and weapons just in case demons or angry Indians trying to reclaim what is rightfully theirs in Nebraska's largest town.

Omaha is a remarkable cool town and a pillar of the best midwestern urban renewal has to offer. Unlike Indianapolis, or Columbus, or Milwaukee, Omaha has a blending of neighborhoods that mix and move toward the hip downtown spots. The made-over warehouse district is one of the best I have ever seen, with endearing shops and local eateries and taverns that dot the sidewalks of well-worn brick roads, complimented

with street musicians. The town reminds me of Belfast in the late 90's, an invariant mix of laid back enthusiasm looking for a goodtime, but in no rush to find it. I drove into town as the sunset on May 11th, from a thirteen-hour road trip that started from the Alamo Heights district of San Antonio and I hadn't eaten all day.

Now, 42 is a unique number. It is the number Jackie Robinson wore when he broke the color barer in baseball. It is the number Ronnie Lott wore when he broke wide receivers for the 49ers, and, to a lesser extent, the Raiders, Jets, and Chiefs. It is the number novelist Douglas Adams claims to be the answer to life, the universe, and everything in his book Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy. But this number doesn't appear important to Guthrie. Nor did he care it was his birthday. As I came rolling into town he seemed more amused in putting a good meal in my mouth, rather than opening presents or blowing out candles. We got scotch ale, and then headed to M's pub for dinner. I threatened to ask our waitress to sing "Happy Birthday" but Guthrie cringed. I insisted on buying his birthday dinner (he had the Reuben sandwich, I the afore mentioned lamb burger that was so hot it burned my hand.) He retaliated in buying me a Nebraska shot glass, complete with cows, a windmill, and a red barn painted to the side. This was as crazy as the night would be. No lawyers required. No use of guns. Little use of money.

Early on, we went back to his joint and waited for Beth to get off work. She's a train conductor, and works late. And I noticed Tim just when he thought I wasn't looking. He was quiet and silent, and maybe for the first time since we met, he looked calm as if there was little left to do. He downloaded the music I brought for his birthday. I laid back on his futon, he lounged on an e-z-chair and we watched Keith Olbermann. We talked some of politics, but not much. He then introduced me to his favorite show, a fifteen-minute oddly drawn cartoon called 12 Ounce Mouse, yet I couldn't seem to figure out which character was the rodent. When Beth came home, the two shared ginger snaps. This is all Big Tim wanted for his big birthday, to sit with his wife and have a cookie. For Tim Guthrie, this is the meaning of life, the universe, and everything. This was Tim's 42.

The next morning I slipped away early leaving a note on the sofa, not wanting to disturb Tim and Beth. This was for the best, as if I had stayed for breakfast I would have stayed for lunch, and probably dinner. And I didn't want to disturb Tim's birthday weekend. It was quiet when I left, just the way Tim wants it.

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