

RYKARDA PARASOL

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Debut Lit Presents "Backstage Pass": A Reading of Original Flash
Fiction by New Authors



So you want a backstage pass into rock-n-roll?

My ex would often introduce me as "the woman he was going to marry". When the leader of the band the Foo Fighters, shook my hand he said "Oh this is the girl?! Nice to meet you". That night in London my boyfriend gave me a sterling silver necklace. We celebrated our brief together time with a cocktail of horse Valium and XTC. Thirty minutes later, the Foo Fighters invited us to sit on stage while they played. We accepted. A few moments after that, while on stage, the band's leader turned and told me to keep it down. I snickered and waved to the crowded house at the Brixton Academy. Later Kiss' Gene Simmons was delighted to sign my boyfriend's ass with red marker, which later stained the lily-white sheets in our hotel room.

Such was typical in those days. Back then I was a "rock and roll widow" as well as a budding musician. My boyfriend's band was finding relative success. With him there were tour buses, all accesses passes, and the David Letterman show. So I got back stage stories coming out of my ears. I lived in LA once. I had a rocker boyfriend there too. My roommate managed a band. All my friend's are musicians. I mean, I know the backstage. I've taken my act on tour and met my own successes and struggles within the dying industry of rock music. Sex, drugs, and dumb-ass behavior. Those are the stories I imagine you want to hear.

In your great grandmother's time it used to be that introverts wrote songs and extroverts preformed them. The thing with modern music is that it begs that some of the most insecure people to not only write their own music, but to also get out there and make spectacles of themselves... alongside other insecure people. We all try to appear tough and cool. We wear leather jackets and studded belts to prove our strength. I love being songwriter and I've learned to love performing. Why I'd venture to say that I'm pretty darn good at both. Behind the scenes though, I'm constantly bitching to my friends about the endless labor, ego clashes, and financial risk. Every small success comes seems with a huge price tag.

Aside from being singer and songwriter slash guitarist, I also must be booking agent, manager, tour manager, roadie, hair stylist, accountant, travel agent, promoter, party girl, public relations, psychologist and graphic designer. I sew my stage clothes. All this to say I must be a masochist too. For all these efforts and drive, I can't get arrested. No record label. No Booking agent. What the fuck is wrong me? I mean "me" not my music. Why would I devote so much time (8 years to be exact) to something so costly to my health, pocket, and energy. Well, if I wanted to make money I'd have gone to business school. And to be honest, a desire for fame seems...well, tacky.

I can only think of this: I believe in the meaning and purpose of my songs. They are an extension of my self and my self-growth. Because my stories are based on my own life they are also tributes and souvenirs for personal experiences and lessons. I find redemption in examining my mistakes and meaning in my losses. I have learned to accept my demons in the process of glorifying them. I can be a real bummer. Yet, I feel purpose in being a female presence in genre where mostly men tread. Contrary to what my physique and hair color may suggest, I'm actually in possession of a soul that must be fed or cease to exist.

My father was born in Poland and orphaned during the Holocaust. At the age of six he went into hiding until the war's end. He lost everyone. From age six to twelve he struggled for survival. For 2 years after the war he was a refugee. The remainder of his youth was spent in Israel on a kibbutz. We didn't talk about Poland. My father had no birth certificate and no citizenship... As a little girl, I knew my mother was Swedish and my daddy Israeli. We ate Swedish meatballs and we ate falafel balls. We were American like that.

Five year ago, an organization contacted my father and asked him if he'd contribute to the restoration the cemetery of Chestahova, Poland. He accepted. My sisters and I were asked to fly with him in support for the cemetery's rededication. I've seen videotape of my sisters crying at the cemetery as my father points to this and that. The audio is horrible. I sadly wasn't able to go to Poland with them. My rock star boyfriend was very ill. Recovery in fact from an Olympic sized addiction to heroin. He was a mess, but I still cared. He'd taken care of me during my bad times. He was family and he'd asked for help. His mother feared she would never see her baby again and asked me to look after him of him and that's what I tried to do. I could not abandon him and I never regretted that decision.

So the first time I went to Poland I was without my family. I was on tour with my band. My old lineup consisted of two hyper narcissists and one affable drummer. At the time I was signed to a German record label (*which, by the way, shadily paid some woman pretending to be my manager my profits and with whom I am still in legal battle with and despite being the "cover girl" I have never seen one cent.*) I was up and coming. I was in German Rolling Stone. I was told I'd be the next "Wovenhand". I was told booo-shit, which I didn't really buy, but the other egos surrounding me were lapping it up. Anyhow, Germany to Poland: Hamburg, Dortmund, and Berlin... Did I mention that my band used to wear yellow roses on our lapels? A symbol of Texas. A theme on my first album. But yellow roses were expensive, so we'd taken to wearing yellow in other forms. My bassist had a sash around his ankle, my guitarist had a yellow hanky in his breast pocket, and I wore yellow in my hair. It looked super cute against our black clothes. In nature, creatures of yellow and black, like the Blacktail snake, are dangerous.

We crossed the border at 8am. As we glided into Poland my song "Candy Gold" came on the radio. I was tickled and our record distributor who was driving was really pleased my music was taking off there. He turned the radio up so I could hear it from the far back of the van. As he did, I looked out the window and saw a sign: "Chestahova 70km". I shrunk in my seat and pulled my hoodie over my head and silently wept in private. Chestahova: where my father was born and hid. Where my grandparents decidedly abandoned their 6-year-old son in hope it would increase his chance of survival. Chestahova: where my grandparents were both murdered and buried in its cemetery. They were forced to strip naked, dig their own graves, and then shot. Having been an officer in the Polish army, my grandfather was given special privilege to have a less tortuous end to his life. He and my grandmother were spared Treblinka. The tour van kept rolling. I strained to view a glimpse of Chestahova as we drove past. I'd missed it. I was unable to speak and share my thoughts. I searched for logic as to why I should weep for people I never knew and whose terror and pain, along with so many, I never experienced, but had imagined since I was little girl.

We arrived in Warsaw at the National Radio Station at 3pm. It's kind of like the Grand Old Opry. There's an audience and stage. It's very professional. The whole country, 38million, love it and tune in. After driving all night the infighting in the band over money, management, fatigue, and "*who was the real star here?*" had reached the ultimate. I've had many lineups and this was the most complex set. They didn't like each other and they hated me.

Saturday October 9th

DEBUT LIT PRESENTS:



NEW AUTHOR SHOWCASE AT LIT CRAWL

Reading will begin promptly at 8.30
Viracocha located at 998 Valencia Street, San Francisco

Hosted by Rebekah Anderson and Rykarda Parasol
**Rock star authors will include: Tony DuShane, Laurie Frankel,
Peg Kingman, and Shannan Rouss.**

It was a mere coincidence that I was touring in Poland when I received word that I was now a Polish citizen. After my father had visited Poland a few years back with my sisters, he was moved to petition to reinstate his citizenship for himself and his children. Like I said, it was a coincidence. To my knowledge I was American and that's how I was perceived. No one assumed that I was now, oddly, Polish. I could've just as well been playing in Czechoslovakia, Greece, or Belgium.

I tried to tell my father of my experience, but he doesn't always like to hear about my musical escapades. If I didn't know better I'd say he thought my story was made up. For many years my father seemed to resent my endeavors in the arts. "Artists were some of the first to be killed" he'd say. "Unless you can play Wagner day and night at Auschwitz, Nazis can't find a reason to keep you alive." But in recent years, my father is more reflective. "I admire your life. Art was a luxury I was unable to venture in. I'm proud that I was able to fight for a life where my children can dream openly."

I was to go on stage last. Backstage at the National Radio Station in Warsaw, I removed the yellow sash from my hair and tied it around my arm. I don't usually say anything before the first song, but that night I said something like:

"Dear Poland: Thank you for welcoming us into your homes. I'd like to dedicate this performance to my father and grandparents. For without their courage I would not be here tonight. Tonight is about new beginnings. For more reasons than I can say, I am so very proud and deeply touched to sing for you tonight."

My stories are often about conflict and resolve. Finding the light within seemingly endless darkness. That night in Warsaw I found the light in my grandparent's story. And the funny thing is that light was "me". I felt small and meek and yet, somehow vulnerably empowered. I wasn't a big rock star, I was a granddaughter, a global citizen, and storyteller.

I've watched music tear apart personal lives. The road is very hard. The temptations and influences are not necessarily connected to our original simple love of song. There's no security in being around so many so insecure. Those who seek fame and fortune can find the limelight and pressure crushing on any level. The insecure introverts, like myself, wrestle against themselves to be believable extroverts.

At his worst, my ex boyfriend's band mates informed me that the record label would not allow a thirty-day break for rehab. Instead, the label asked him to clean up on his own within the drug addled band and the roadies who shot up with him. If he was unable to do this, he would be fired. "Don't call his parents" his drummer begged me. Their careers were at stake. They'd spent 8 years of handwork enduring one sacrifice after another. They were now owning homes and looking to start families.

A friend of the band overdosed in the bed next to my boyfriend and died. Thirty days later my boyfriend was fired anyway. I hunted down his family and made the call. Blood poisoning was consuming his body. The doctor said he would've survived 5 or 6 more days. He entered rehab after being released from the hospital. We finally broke up. Since then, he's much better. Last February he texted me "I should've married you". Seriously? I felt I'd done nothing more than add to his guilt and pain and the endless cycle of addiction.

If you ever date a rock star, whatever you do, don't say them you miss them all the time. The pain of your discomfort, knowing they cannot be with you, tortures them. Instead, tell them to be guiltless in their pursuit of art and be patient. Sooner or later the touring will end and if they've got a soul that needs to be fed, then maybe one day their hunger can be satisfied by growing old with you. The key to their survival is in knowing that you will survive without them. Accept that you will have survivor's guilt if they should lose their way and get caught by the enemy. In their absence, learn to surround yourself with confident and courageous people who keep their egos in check and who believe in the songs and whom you feel comfortable enough to weep in front of. Play music with people you can honestly call friends as well as band mates. Call your father from the road. And don't forget it's better to be a "rock and roll widow" than to be a widow, I suppose.

- by Rykarda Parasol, © 2010

** This past October I visited Israel for my father's 75th birthday and one week later, I returned to Poland to perform at Festival Ars Cameralis in Katowice, Poland, which celebrates music, art, poetry, theatre, and film. I am currently on hiatus to write and get back to being creative.*