

Munchkins in the land of Ozz

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It's ninety-something degrees in Hartford, Connecticut, and the air conditioning is busted on Pure Rubbish's crappy, problem-plagued RV. Seventeen-year-old lead guitarist and singer Derek Dunivan admits to not having had a shower in a week. His fifteen-- year-old brother, Evan, the drummer, says he hasn't changed his underwear for days. They've been living like this for three months now - these events take place during the summer of 2001 - crossing America with Ozzfest, driving hundreds of miles at a stretch to play a handful of songs to sometimes hostile crowds at an ungodly hour of the morning. On top of all that, their mother is following them in a rented Ford Escort.

Still, the Dunivan brothers couldn't be happier. "Ozzfest is the best thing that ever happened to us," Evan declares.

"It's sea-donkey heaven," Derek says in an awestruck voice. "A twenty-four-hour party."

Sea donkey is this year's Ozzfest slang for groupie, though the derivation of the phrase remains shrouded in mystery.

"Did you check out those donkeys after the show this morning?" Derek asks. "I was signing their titties."

Derek, a waifishly slender kid with bleached hair, tight pants and an armful of bracelets, is a glam anomaly among the ferociously pierced and tattooed frontmen who rule the new-metal scene at Ozzfest. But neither his androgynous appearance nor his tender years - and not even his mother's watchful presence - are a hindrance in his search for the female companionship that is the male rock star's due.

Derek does most of his donkey hunting in the company of Anthony Focx, rhythm guitarist for the band Beautiful Creatures. That band's old green bus is Party Central on the second-stage lot, a hotbed of sea-donkey activity. Derek, who's about as worldly in these matters as it's possible for a seventeen-year-old to be, seems bewildered by some of the debauchery he's witnessed. One day, he says, three girls started "getting wacky" in the Creatures' bus. Soon they were naked and putting on a show.

"It was fun," he says, laughing nervously. "It was like Caligula or something."

WHILE DEREK AND ANTHONY ARE off showing the sea donkeys of central Connecticut a good time, Evan and bassist Mike McWilliams (rhythm guitarist Jarrett Gardner fills out the band) head out into the night with a girl named Jana (not her real name). Her connection to Ozzfest is both vague (she wears a pass and claims to be "friends" with lots of bands) and highly tenuous (she's been banished from the festival for unspecified problematic behavior and needs to avoid certain people in authority). They make a quick tour of the secondstage parking lot, paying visits to the well-appointed buses of some other, better-established bands, staying long enough only for the guys to express their envy of the large TVs and other furnishings. Nothing symbolizes a band's status at Ozzfest more clearly than their mode of transportation. Pure Rubbish have four members, a tour manager and one driver/drum tech packed in a single tiny RV; Black Sabbath get seven buses.

From the parking lot, Mike, Evan and Jana continue on to the Marilyn Manson show in the main arena, standing in front of the stage for two songs. Then Jana says they can crash a barbecue at the Papa Roach bus.

Unfortunately, when the Pure Rubbish posse arrives at the main-stage parking lot, there's no barbecue in sight. They run into Slipknot vocalist Corey Taylor, who's riding in a golf cart, unrecognized by the crowd without his dreadlock-enhanced mask. When Jana asks if there's going to be a party on the Slipknot bus, Taylor says that the band is heading to Boston to find a hotel and relax.

"I'm just gonna get naked and watch porn for nine hours," he says wearily, like a guy who's earned the right.

So they wander back to the secondstage parking lot, pinballing aimlessly around the Ozzfest grounds like teenagers loitering anywhere in small-town America, wandering from McDonald's to the minimall and back to McDonald's again, looking for the party. Except that in small-town America, you generally don't run into anyone from Slipknot, or a girl wearing vinyl hot pants who looks like a vampire and has "Rape Me Manson" scrawled across her back in big, black letters. But sometimes, even at Ozzfest, even on a hot summer night, you can look everywhere and never find the party.

LATER, AFTER THE BAND HAS FINALLY regrouped, Tracy Dunivan - Derek and Evan's mother - boards the RV. She's in a surprisingly good mood for a woman who's spent most of her day sitting alone in her rental car with the air conditioner blasting, taking care of business on a cell phone. She looks on with weary amusement as Derek ogles a photo of pop singer "V"lla Ford in Stuff magazine.

"I dig this girl," he says. "And you can print that."

"Why?" asks Tracy. "So she'll read it and want to go out with you?"

it's hard to enjoy all the side benefits of being in a rock band on tour when your mother is along for the ride, but there are ways: Derek Dunivan manages to sneak in some private time with the sea donkeys (that's his arm partly visible above and a bit more of him to the right). Still, the boys spent a lot of their Ozzfest summer playing Nintendo, as seen below, with Jarrett on the controller.

"Maybe," says Derek.

"She's too old for you, honey," Tracy says. "Women are more mature than boys."

Derek doesn't argue. Tracy says good night to her sons and tells them she loves them. She's barely out the door when Derek heads into the back of the RV for a well-thumbed copy of High Society. He and Evan are partial to a spread about a teacher instructing two students in what appears to be an unusual elective.

"I've always had a schoolgirl fantasy," says Derek.

"Yeah," agrees Evan. When he smiles, you can see his braces. "Those plaid skirts turn me on."

TRACY DUNIVAN IS AN ATTRACTIVE, neatly dressed thirty-nine-year-old woman from Texas who is always impeccably coiffed and made-up. When she's not chaperoning Pure Rubbish and home-schooling her sons, Tracy works as a coach and manager of child actors in Houston. Her husband, Willie, is a musician. So Tracy knows a thing or two about the rock lifestyle. But Ozzfest is clearly taking a toll on her.

"I've seen my sons stray a little from their roots," she says. "Believe me, they're very much aware of what I like and don't like about Ozzfest."

While most young rockers wouldn't relish the thought of spending their first big national tour with Mom aboard, the members of Pure Rubbish don't seem to resent Tracy's presence. Partly this is because it's legally necessary - performers under the age of eighteen have to be accompanied by a guardian - and partly it's because Tracy has been so supportive of the band.

"My mom's the most caring mother in the world," Derek says.

"It's a little inconvenient," is the worst any of the guys can bring themselves to say on the subject of maternal supervision at Ozzfest. (Some others aren't so restrained, however. "It's not her place," says a crew member for another band. "This is rock & roll; this is not mama camp.")

In the end, Tracy says, all the moral pitfalls of Ozzfest don't outweigh a simple fact: Her sons are doing what they love to do, living a life they've chosen. "Some kids are meant to start entertaining at a very early age," she declares.

This almost mystical sense of destiny is something that Tracy clings to when trying to account for her sons' precocious rise in the rock world. Derek was eleven years old when he first picked up the guitar with serious intentions. "Willie taught him Elvis' 'Marie's the Name,' " Tracy remembers, "and half an hour later he could play it better than his father." Around the same time, Evan discovered a similar aptitude for drumming. The boys started playing with their dad and then couldn't be stopped.

Tracy seems both proud and a bit wistful when considering the journey that's brought them, in such a short time, from jamming in their bedroom to performing in front of thousands of people. When the conversation turns to Ozzfest, however, her tone changes.

"After all the years I've spent in the entertainment business, you'd think nothing would shock me," she says. "But when you're here as a mother, it's different."

"ALL RIGHT, MOTHERFUCKERS, we're Pure Rubbish from Houston, Texas, and we're about to kick your ass!"

Derek launches every Ozzfest show with the exact same threat. Pure Rubbish play the third stage on a revolving slate of bands, which means that their performances start as early as 10:10 in the morning and no later than 15 in the afternoon, hardly prime time for ass-kicking. The audience at the Tweeter Center in Mansfield, Massachusetts, outside Boston, is composed of the early birds, the kids with a whole day to kill before the Slipknot show. Not the easiest people in the world to please.

The set opens with "Kiss of Death," and suddenly it's 1982 again. Or maybe even 1975. You hardly ever hear rock this raw and basic anymore. Four chords, a beat and a chanted chorus -- "Gone! Gone! Gone!/With just one kiss of death" - that makes you want to shout along.

But the crowd at the Tweeter Center looks puzzled. It's never heard of Pure Rubbish, and it's not sure what to think of these skinny kids in tight pants, the singer making funny faces and sliding onto his knees to peel off a wicked little guitar solo. You can almost see the cartoon bubble forming in the air: This isn't metal....

It's not just the music that sets Pure Rubbish apart, it's their vibe, too. Instead of rants about death and dysfunction, their songs tend toward nostalgic tributes to the kind of rock & roll hedonism that went out of style with Motley Crue. When Pure Rubbish kick your ass, they do it in a nice way - they want you to enjoy it. It takes a couple of songs, but the novelty of this finally starts to sink in. By the time the band finishes its set, a lot of people in the crowd aren't just cheering, they're grinning, too, exercising muscles that aren't going to get much of a workout during the rest of the long, hot day.

After the show, the band retires to the ovenlike RV to play Nintendo. For long periods there's no sound except the clicking of the controllers. Then, out of nowhere, Derek addresses Jarrett.

"Who's gayer, you or Liberace?" "I'd have to go with me on that one," Jarrett deadpans.

Then silence again as they stare vacantly at the video-game action. Apropos of nothing, Mike speaks: "A little later, I'm gonna go dump over a porta-- potty. That's hard-core."

"You wanna be hard-core?" Derek asks. "Walk up to a fan and stab him." Mike agrees that stabbing a fan would be more hard-core than tipping over a porta-potty. Derek takes a bite of Mike's Milky Way without asking.

"Dude," Mike says. "You're a known herpes patient, and you're munching on my candy bar."

The afternoon stretches out and grows even hotter. Then someone mentions Kurt Cobain, and the atmosphere in the RV changes. Derek and Jarrett grow suddenly alert. "I just thought it was

ridiculous how they blew him up like he was John Lennon," Derek says.

"Kurt Cobain swam in a sea of contradictions," Jarrett says. "He was against getting big, going mainstream. Everything he preached against, he turned around and did."

"Nirvana never did anything for me," Derek says. "They were against the bands that really did have a punkrock influence, like Guns n' Roses."

"Cobain was just a crybaby," Jarrett adds.

"Guns n' Roses were real," Derek says, his voice full of admiration. "They were scumbags."

WILLIE "PUNK DADDY" DUNIVAN, A twenty-five-year veteran of the Houston rock scene, spends his days working at Rockin Robin Guitars and Music, a store that caters to local rockers and visiting stars alike. In the mid-Nineties he fronted a "rootsy trash-rock" band called Personality Crisis while moonlighting on drums for the almost-all-girl punk band Stinkerbell and the short-lived Cheetah Chrome Project, led by the former Dead Boys guitarist. Willie, who is forty, is also a passionate record collector.

"I've got an album collection about 5,000 deep," he says proudly. "My sons have spent their lives culling through it."

Rock & roll used to be music you listened to for the purpose of annoying your parents, but for the Dunivans it's the glue that has bonded one generation to the next. Willie is more than just mentor and musical guru to Pure Rubbish. He was their original singer; he and his sons had been performing as Pure Rubbish since 1995, when they played a tribute show to mark the twentieth anniversary of Kiss Alive. Evan was nine years old at the time, Derek eleven.

Toby Blunt, manager of the Houston club Mary Jane's, remembers the oddly wholesome ambience of the early Pure Rubbish shows. "It was like a fishing trip," he says with a laugh. "The kids just came along with the package of Willie's lifestyle. That's the way it is down here in Texas."

It was at Mary Jane's that Pure Rubbish first came to the attention of Nashville Pussy, who invited the band to open for them on a national tour. Willie was still fronting the band the night Scott Givens of Divine Recordings first saw it play. By the time Givens brought Ozzfest organizer Sharon Osbourne, Ozzy's wife, to check out the band, Willie had stepped aside in favor of Derek.

"Willie saw it coming," says Givens. "I'd been trying to talk Derek into being a vocalist for a while," says Willie. "If the kids have any success, I can be a coattail rider."

Willie traveled with Pure Rubbish during the first half of Ozzfest, pulling double duty as chaperon and drum tech. He accompanied the band to Paris to open a show for AC/DC, which all the members agree was a turning point.

"It moved us up to the next level," says Derek, energized by the memory. "Our morale was just kinda low at the time, because we were on Ozzfest and we weren't getting the best crowd response we thought we could get.... And then we go over to France and play with AC/DC - I mean, it was just awesome. We got to play in front of 50,000 people, and the crowd went crazy."

The triumphant journey abroad was not without its difficulties. On the night before they were to return home, the

band got into an altercation with a Parisian hotel clerk that escalated into a brawl. Bottles and chairs were involved; the clerk apparently brandished a tiny pocketknife.

"That was a terrible experience in Paris," says Willie. "One guy pulled a knife on the kids. That kinda scared me. You get that mother-hen reaction."

"My dad got a pool cue and smashed it over the guy's head," Derek recalls proudly. Right after that, Tracy replaced Willie as the band's minder.

IT'S HARD NOT TO SYMPATHIZE with Tracy Dunivan's plight, accompanying her kids through heavy-metal Sodom and Gomorrah, especially during the end-of-tour party at the Tweeter Center. The festivities get going around midnight, after the fans have cleared out. It's a lavishly catered affair with an open bar, packed with musicians, industry people, crew members and attractive young women. Ozzfest has also sprung for a team of strippers, and when Tracy and the guys arrive, these hardworking girls have just begun their show.

Tracy Dunivan watches over her fifteen-year-old son, Evan, who doesn't really mind - but not everyone feels that way. "This is not mama camp," says a roadie for another band.

"At least they have clothes on," Tracy says, eyeing the dancers. "If the clothes come off, my sons are getting pulled right out of there."

Fifteen minutes later, the clothes come off. There's a girl-girl oral-sex scene taking place on a makeshift stage, and more interactive forms of entertainment elsewhere in the room. Because there are no chairs, the guys who want lap dances have to lie down so the dancers can straddle them.

The grassy backstage courtyard is packed with revelers. Derek, Evan and Mike plunge into the crowd, while Jarrett and Tracy make their way to the karaoke tent. After the drummer from American Head Charge croons a soulful version of "Dock of the Bay," Corey Taylor takes the stage and leads the crowd in "Rock and Roll All Night." When he's finished, Taylor experiences a little trouble deciding what to sing next. Some rowdy audience members heckle him for his indecision.

"You motherfuckers," he replies, grinning. "I'm gonna fist-fuck every one of you!"

Tracy sits stone-faced.

A short time later, in the catering area, one of the strippers is standing by the edge of the stage, presenting her bare ass for a spanking. A bunch of guys have lined up for the privilege. Among a small crowd of interested spectators is Anthony Focx. Standing beside him is Derek, with a huge grin on his face.

When I catch up with Tracy over lunch in Holmdel, New Jersey (the tour's final stop), a few days later, she's in a reflective mood about the party.

"I didn't like what was going on in one room," she says flatly. "As a liberated woman and a mom, I didn't see how that was necessary. But there are a lot of men here for whom that's their main form of entertainment." Tracy says that she doesn't object to nudity per se but to "the atmosphere of enticement. I wasn't going to tolerate some young lady enticing my sons."

I ENTER PURE RUBBISH'S RV A SHORT time later and find the two Dunivan brothers on the couch, flanking a longlegged blonde in tight denim hot pants and a matching top. She has two piercings in her navel, and numerous Band-- Aids on her legs. Her name, she says, is Laura, and she hails from Plymouth, Massachusetts. She seems a little drunk.

"I'm hammered," she says happily. Laura says that she's been traveling with Marilyn Manson for a while but prefers hanging out with the guys in Pure Rubbish. At first it seems that she's with Evan - after all, he has one arm around her shoulder - but a few minutes later she begins making out with Derek. When they break off the kiss, she takes his hand and begins sucking his index finger, as if auditioning for an instructional video. When she finally stops, even she seems a bit surprised.

"I can't believe I just did that," she says, blushing slightly and looking from one brother to the other. "I'm not gonna sleep with either one of you."

A few minutes later they're joined by Laura's friend Gina, who says she's been having the time of her life, starting when Manson spotted her in the audience and brought her up onstage.

"He flashed my boobs to the crowd and starting touching me all over my body, which was totally cool, because I'm a huge Manson fan," Gina says. To prove it, she pulls down her shorts to show her idol's name tattooed on her ass. "The only cooler thing was when I got to play a dead naked body on NYPD Blue."

The guys are quizzing her about her acting career when there's a knock on the door.

It's Tracy.

She climbs aboard, pausing a moment to take in the scene. Understandably, she doesn't look happy to see a drunk girl in hot pants and a vampire sexpot in fishnet stockings making themselves at home in her sons' RV. With a stern expression, she takes Evan aside and begins to whisper her displeasure. The RV's so small it's impossible not to overhear.

"But it's the last day of the tour," Evan says in the aggrieved tone of an adolescent interrupted in the middle of an excellent time.

"The second-to-last," Tracy corrects him.

"People are hanging out," he says, as if this fact trumps any possible objection.

"You tell them to take it elsewhere."

"Bye, Mom," Evan says.

Tracy hesitates for a moment, trying to decide how far to push this. She'd be within her rights to ask the girls to leave, of course, but she doesn't seem eager to make an embarrassing scene. In the end, she retreats from the RV, but not before flashing her sons one of those looks whose meaning wouldn't have to be explained to any teenager on the receiving end: We'll talk about this later, mister.

After Tracy leaves, there's an awkward silence in the RV. No one knows whether to joke about what just happened or to leave it alone. Evan sits and puts his hand on Laura's leg. He looks younger than he did a couple of minutes ago, a little less like a rock star. Laura takes a swig of beer and smiles at him, but it's a sympathetic smile, the kind you give your friend when you know he just got busted.

TOM PERROTTA wrote the novels "Election," "Joe College" and "The Wishbones."