

ACEweek

06.10.10
LEXINGTON'S FREE NEWSPAPER

Light and Shadow



Remembering
**Forrest
Payne**
1965-2010



Missing Forrest

On film and freedom and remembering Forrest Payne

by Mick Jeffries



Photo by Lee Thomas

I never saw it, but apparently my old friend Forrest Payne had a business card that categorized him as "*general good guy*." I 'd like to politely suggest "*exceptional*" as more appropriate, at this particular time.

Forrest as unique of a character as I have ever known died in New York's Hudson Valley on May 31, after a year's battle with a particularly deadly brain cancer. This has come as a giant shock to the many people whose lives were touched by him and whom in many cases *didn't even know he was sick*. But Forrest was exceptional, in so many ways, and one of those ways was a preference that people in no way dwell on a possibly terminal illness that he *might* have.

And I confess: I wouldn't have been entirely surprised if he had lived on far beyond his 44 years just by casually sidestep-

ping "*the whole cancer thing*."

I wish he could have done that.

In the many years that we spent as close friends, his natural talent for *Being* always captivated me. He was a master photographer, a gifted improvisational musician and songwriter, a smirking impromptu soother, and a liver of Life with a capital "L."

In the Lexington house we shared for several years, he was likely at any given time to be ardently strumming his acoustic guitar, working out the middle parts of *who-knew-how-many* compositions that were all in some way manifestations of him. He

was a priest of homemade popcorn, could resurrect dead stale tortilla chips into epic nachos.

We shared a high school darkroom in Owensboro, a house in Lexington, and a blue million adventures and insights in between, a span of something like 20 years.

From the earliest days of our friendship, one of the things that I liked about Forrest was that he didn't hesitate to *adventure*, and he would **do things** not because they were *crazy*, but *because they were not*. Like climbing water towers at night (or at all), or exploring caves with a disposable lighter for

illumination. What I understood from our adventures (*because it was largely unspoken*) was: *'Never mind those alarmist 'normal' people who say this is dangerous or bad or illegal. This is an important adventure, we're not harming anybody or anything, and we'll be careful.'*

And those things were all true *and still are*. With Forrest, I felt my confidence for such things emboldened because he was so casual about them. These things needed to be done, because *they were there*. Because now was **Now** and *why not, anyway?* I can still see this gleam in his eye upon confronting, say, the unintentionally-unlocked door

to a commercial rooftop. And he might look at me with *that gleam* as if to say: "Should we? Of course we should."

And we did. **He did.** Over and over. *It was his way.*

A long time ago in Owensboro, Forrest was called "Bryan" and we shared a darkroom at Daviess County High School. We weren't close then not yet— but we were friends; first in photography, and then later in off-beat "smart" music like XTC and The Cure and Talking Heads. And these were two of the main things that seemed to be saving me from the smothering droning death too easily presented by high school.

That darkroom was a sanctuary, and we both knew it, but it probably went unsaid. In that darkroom, we didn't have to answer to *anybody*, except maybe Tom Grimsley, an exceedingly cool art/photography teacher who was a powerful influence on Forrest. And I knew what he knew: we could think in there. We could think about *a single*

frame of Kodak Tri-X Pan film wedged in an enlarger, and about the music from a tattered jam box, playing cassette tapes piously made, and proclaiming tentative but tenacious independence into the darkness.

It was a powerful and meaningful elixir, and I was always happy to drink it for the opportunity to drink it with Forrest. To me, Forrest was one of several who said: "Be great. Be great *right now*. C'mon. Let's go."

Where to? For Forrest, I think it was always to meet more of himself and you, too, along the way. Being with him was an affirmation that **only good** could come from such efforts, for any of us humans.

Wandering in the woods was something he liked to do traipsing, less than hiking. Because when you traipse around somewhere like the Red



Forrest Payne in 1987 while on a country drive in his Volvo station wagon outside of Lexington, Ky. (Photo by Greg Eans)

River Gorge, it's hard to know where you may wind up, but *it's bound to be beautiful* and I like to think this was a core value inside of him. He liked caves, too, and would rarely pass up investigating one, whether suitably prepared or not. A favorite one is called Tapp's Cave, nestled in the Palisades on the Kentucky River and Forrest and our circle of friends went there many times. Through thick brush, and only available to

from the outside world. Lit by candles dutifully stuffed into pockets and bookbags, it was our concert hall for petit instruments like thumb pianos, ukeleles and voices. I will never forget those concerts (*or the bats that occasionally preempted and sent us stumbling urgently back towards the entrance*).

So we got chased out by bats. *So maybe Forrest got chased by a swarm of bees once.* He was a warrior — a warrior of and for the mind and the spirit, I think. I looked up "warrior" to make sure and read "*a person who shows or has shown great vigor, courage*" and yeah that sounds like Forrest.

And let me be clear: *If you never knew him, this person I'm describing?* He wasn't some gnarly, hang loose, party-down adventure hound — even though he was from California. He was quiet and calm. Unnervingly so, at times — because he wasn't shy. *Not all quiet people are shy*, and I can't think of a better example than Forrest

Payne. Everything always seemed fine with Forrest, sometimes mad-deningly so.

He was like water. I'm not sure that I ever saw him lose his cool.

Once, in one of those *why, not?* times, Forrest and I had arrived at a Bluegrass farm party, and happened upon a herd of llamas, a couple of hundred yards away in a field. Without a word, we both agreed that *the thing to do* was to hop the fence, and venture out for a closer look, and probably some pictures. About 50 yards into the field — too far to turn back the llamas saw us and began stampeding *towards us*. I remember that we exchanged a few observations owing to how neither

Throughout the 90s, Ace's Pages were enriched by Forrest Payne's photography. Included are just a few iconic bands he photographed.



Supafuzz, 1996



Catawampus, 1996



10 Ft. Pole

of us really knew whether llamas were *maybe deadly and vengeful animals*.

But Forrest wasn't running, so I didn't. And a dozen llamas continued to charge full speed towards us. As I braced to be trampled, they stopped, literally a couple of inches from our noses, snorting in our faces. Some tentative pats were given, and then we **backed** out of the field, one step at a time, with the llamas matching us step for step.

Other times, I remember playing music with Forrest. He was a remarkable drummer and a great bass player and an inspired songwriter. Not only did he spend regular hours in communion with the act of **playing music alone** (*and with others*), he gave me permission to do that, too. He showed me that it was okay to play *just for oneself* — not necessarily learning songs or trying to be in a band or even practicing. *Just playing*. And in the years that we lived together, some of my fondest memories are with him in "the music room," where we kept drums and amps and guitars, set up and plugged in, waiting to be of service to the Muse. But the most vivid channeling of Forrest's

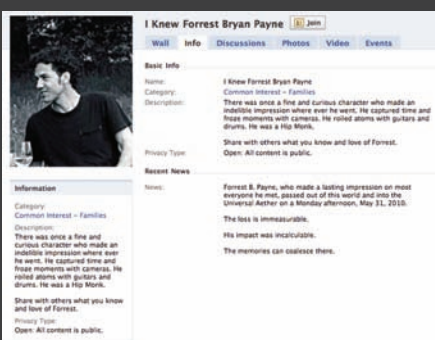
He was a warrior — a warrior of and for the mind and the spirit, I think. I looked up "warrior" to make sure and read "a person who shows or has shown great vigor, courage..." and yeah — that sounds like Forrest.

the most dedicated wanderers, it contained a lofty chamber, well inside and far away

ANNE HOPKINS: Forrest took some amazing photographs for Good Foods that we still use. He and Caitlin also graciously opened their home several years for the Good Foods Christmas party, and I remember thinking how calm and peaceful he seemed in the midst of all the craziness. He was so gifted, so open and caring. He seemed like an... old soul to me. Forrest, I know you are laughing with delight as you walk along the Shining Way. It is those who love you who need blessings in this life as they begin the hard journey of learning to live without you.



Photo by Forrest Payne. Courtesy of Good Foods Market & Caf



"I KNEW FORREST"
Friends with memories and photos and clips to share can join the Facebook page, I Knew Forrest Bryan Payne, which reads:

"There was once a fine and curious character who made an indelible impression where ever he went. He captured time and froze moments with cameras. He roiled atoms with guitars and drums. He was a Hip Monk."
Go to www.IKnewForrest.com to be routed to the page.

muse might have been through the camera, wit, his uncanny talent.

and he will without question live on through the treasured photographs that were his gift to so many. Mr. Grimsley, the art teacher, said of "Bryan" at age 15: "He had such a gift. *It was easy for him* the way it is for people who are gifted."

Because we'd shared cameras and darkrooms for so many years, I like to think of us as *peers*. But while I've never given up photography as a casual outlet, it was Forrest who was always married to it, in love with it. And, as Mr. Grimsley said, *so gifted with it*.

So much of the wonder that Forrest imparted was wordless. And in the face the loss of him, it seems like words are rather inadequate. Things that I've heard others say when they've lost loved ones like "I can't

believe he's gone" seize me now, make me shake sometimes, though he's actually "been gone" for a while.

Forrest followed his heart from the Bluegrass to the Hudson Valley of New York years ago, though it's obvious from the posts at www.IKnewForrest.com that he has been far from forgotten by the great wealth of people who were touched by his unique spirit, his unearthly calm, his



Forrest Payne, right, and brother Scot on a trampoline circa 1988 in Lexington, Ky. (Photo by Greg Eans)

And maybe some strange symptom of this rarified and blessed mixture was that he was nearly impossible to keep in touch with. Surely his friends would agree on that point. *(To which it might be added with affection and humor: anyone who enjoyed the gift of his wedding photography followed by the trial of actually trying to get prints from him.)*

In the words of Kate Stamps, mother of his daughter, Sophie, he was "indeed out of touch with old friends, but with no malice. He had just moved on to other parts of his life and was absorbed in the moment. He still loved all he had ever loved; time is just too short to keep all avenues well-traveled."

What a traveler he was, Forrest Bryan Payne!

He was a traveler of the soul and the spirit, and I don't know that I've ever met a more ardent explorer. And how lucky I've been to have traveled with him some of the way.

Thank you, Forrest, for sharing the ride.

An event to honor Forrest is currently being organized. For updates, read www.IKnewForrest.com. ■



Photo by Lee Thomas



Forrest Payne, left, and Greg Eans cutting up during a rest stop on the way to see The Police in concert in Lexington, KY in 1983. Payne and Eans were in a band called EQ, with Payne's brother Scot, at the time. (Photo by Scot Payne)

THE HARRODSBURG FESTIVAL OF BOOKS & ARTS



Saturday, June 26, 2010

Beautiful, Historic
Downtown

Harrodsburg, Kentucky

Celebrate the Arts!

ON THE MAIN STAGE

*Musical and Theatrical
Performances*

*Readings by
Featured Authors*

**ON MAIN STREET
Children's Activity Area**

Draw, Paint, Create

ART EXHIBITS

FOOD VENDORS