

Drifting in the dark



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By Nate Smelle

SUMMER, for me is defined by the quality and the quantity of the road trips I take. Without the wacky winter weather, we become accustomed to for six months of the year here in North Hastings throwing up roadblocks, the possibilities to explore are virtually endless. Whether driving for 12 hours or more to see a concert or spending an extra 20 minutes taking the long way home from work, each of these types of excursions have the potential to enrich our lives with an experience that exists outside our normal routines.

Before heading out on the road, my friends and I would take great care in crafting a collection of mixed tapes and CDs to provide a soundtrack for whatever adventure awaited us. Now that we can store almost our entire music collections on a small plastic and metal USB stick, this once essential step in preparing for a memorable journey has been lost. The time we would spend, often together, arranging the different pieces of music, gauging which songs and artists would create the best atmosphere for our explorations, always turned out to be an experiment in creativity that brought us closer together. After recently bringing home an old cassette player from the SIRCH warehouse on Hwy 28 just south of Bancroft, I dedicated the rest of the night to searching through some of my old tapes.

Listening to a pile of cassettes that I found in a box in my barn, I noticed how artists such as Neil Young, Pavement, the Brian Jonestown Massacre, and the Grateful Dead each had a strong presence on every single tape. Despite their solid representation in my dusty music collection, there was one band, Ween, that had somehow made its way onto every side of every tape at least once. Indulging in a series of tracks from their albums *The Mollusk*, *Chocolate and Cheese*, and *La Cucaracha*, I was reminded of the last time I listened to the Ween mix tape; and how the song "Drifter in the Dark" fit so well with my first trip down Old Peterson Road late one night on my way home from Algonquin Park. Remembering how good it felt to be listening to the right song, in the right place at the right time that night, I typed Ween into the search engine on my computer and found that they were performing a show at Art Park in Lewiston, New York on July 28.

Thinking of how that moonlight drive helped to inspire my first affection for this area and feeling the urge to hit the road to see Ween for the second time, I soon found myself at the US border listening to the song "Woman and Man" at full volume as I waited my turn in line. Clearing customs, I put the pedal down in order to make it to the concert with enough time to hang out with some of the other music freaks who had travelled great distances to see the show. Hooking up with a band from Florida that was drumming on one of the musical sculptures in the park before the show, we headed into the amphitheater to join the thousands of people already gathered to take in the spectacle known as Ween. Performing more than 30 songs during their nearly three-hour long set, Dean and Gene Ween certainly did not disappoint. Not only was the music flawless, but the setting was absolutely perfect with the sinking sun casting a pink-orange light on the band and a full moon rising behind the smoke-filled stage. Scanning over the crowd during the encore I could not see a single person ? even counting those in line for the Johnny-on-the-spot ? who was not dancing. Still mesmerized by the music by the time I made it back to the border, I crossed back into Canada with Pure Guava pouring out of the speakers in my car. Parked in traffic on the 401 while driving back to Bancroft the next day, I plugged the recording of the

previous night's show that I found in my boot, into the car stereo to help take me away from the annoying reality of stop-and-go traffic.

Thinking back to how the dirty box of tapes in my barn had inspired me to head out on this journey; and how one of those cassettes had originally helped to enhance my appreciation of North Hastings, I decided to take the next exit, so I could prolong the road trip by taking the long way home.