

THE HALLOWEEN PARTY

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Tuesday was a day of setup at our recording studio, a time to assemble and check the myriad of cords that run from the control booth throughout the live room. Microphones were set up, tested, and maybe a little music even went over the wires. When all was said and done, as mentioned in yesterday's blog, the team returned and we all got serious about eating a large pan of paella. It is winter weather here, and the hot, spicy, brightly colored paella really hit the spot.

Wednesday morning, of course, I was up way before dawn, but around 9 AM or so the crew started drifting in, and breakfast was happening. We were all reminded that today was Halloween when my daughter May walked in wearing some elaborate face painting. I enclose a photo. This was, she said, her Halloween costume and we talked about when she was young and went out for trick-or-treat in this same neighborhood.

Well, that energized some of the rest of the crew to consider costumes themselves and Margaret dragged out a whole bag of old costume stuff. Some were more motivated to find a costume than others. Seth Bernard's idea of a costume was a baseball hat with a propeller on the top. That was it, he said. Later I was told he found a turban. And much later that night, May painted his face. In the meantime they were off to the studio to record and I didn't see them for a while.

They had been in the studio since mid-morning by the time I found time to stop by and observe. I got there a little after 5 PM. The place was a maze of cords, instruments, and connections. They were busy doing overdubs. I slipped onto a couch, put on a pair of headphones and listened for a while. It was a new song by May; I don't even know the name.

Seth was layering in some fuzzy guitar riffs and there was much discussion of exactly which of a couple of tone stylings would be right. They ended up recording several.

The weather is still cold here (and will be until spring), so I volunteered to cook another dinner, this time veggie-chili with cilantro, sharp cheddar, and fine-cut onion for toppings. This, some rye bread, and a bunch of oven-roasted Brussels sprouts (dusted with salt, pepper, and a little olive oil) rounded out the offerings. A little Spartan, but good nevertheless.

The studio crew showed up around 7:30 PM and there was some serious eating for a while and then additional face painting, followed by more than a few stories told, with Seth asking me to tell story after story. I was not too into it until he asked me to tell the one about the fart-machine story. I will share that one with you.

One of my closest friends is Ngodup Burkhar, a Tibetan who translated for my teacher Khenpo

Karthar Rinpoche for something like twelve years. Before that, he was with the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, and today he frequently translates for the 17th Karmapa. We became friends years ago, traveled in India together, and so on.

Once upon a time when Ngodup was visiting us, I could not resist sharing my little fart machine on him, first of course testing it out on him, as I sometimes do for very special guests. Remember, I am the oldest of five brothers, with no sisters. Boys naturally like these things.

Anyway, Ngodup instantly fell in love with that fart machine and declared that there were a lot of rinpoches he knew who would like to see this, so I gave it to him, of course. When it came time for Ngodup to leave, he packed his bags, which included the fart machine. All was well, or so we thought.

However, when Ngodup got to the Grand Rapids International Airport, while his bags were being searched, there was a problem. Remember, Ngodup is Tibetan and looked anything but like your average American. All of a sudden, Ngodup found himself surrounded by police, while on the floor in front of him was one of his suitcases, open, with things scattered about. They had discovered the fart machine and, of course, assumed it was a bomb. It was a real tense scene.

There was Ngodup and his suitcase, still surrounded by police, while one very brave policeman carefully crept up to suitcase, leaned in, and gently poked the item-in-question with a little stick, and then turned to the rest of the police and shouted out. "I've got one of these at home. It's just a fart machine!" Everyone laughed, and Ngodup, now relaxed, was allowed to go on his way.

Anyway, that story led to some very funny musical shenanigans that I won't spell out here. A good time was had by all and then the crew headed back down to the studio for a late-night session, and I went off to bed. I probably should not have told you that story, but to me it is funny.