



Townes Van Zandt CountryStyle News Photo

Van Zandt

His Hobby Is Living Colorful Lifestyle

But I guess I'll keep gambling lots of booze and lots of rambling. Well, it's easier than just waiting 'round to die. ("Waiting 'Round To Die")

Songpoet Townes Van Zandt is one rare creature. With a history of bouts with bizarre behavior almost as legendary as his music, this Texas singer-songwriter has managed to elude all but a cult following of admirers after seven critically acclaimed albums. But his growing band of supporters is also one of the strongest and most loyal of any artist.

Critics endlessly rave about Van Zandt's sensitive songs of desperation, loneliness and heartache. Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson, Kris Kristofferson and Mickey Newbury are counted among his fans. Hoyt Axton, Steve Young and Doc Watson have recorded Van Zandt compositions and he hit on a brief bit of notoriety when Emmylou Harris cut his "Pancho and Lefty" for her "Luxury Liner" LP.

Townes enjoys a glorious reputation as a songwriter, but he also seems to enjoy a notorious reputation as one of America's wildest hellraisers — a character trait witnessed and shared by his two close friends, singer-songwriters Jerry Jeff Walker and Guy Clark.

"Townes 'n' me 'n' Jerry Jeff we go way back," relates Clark. "Man, there were some pretty wild nights. You know, Townes is pretty crazed sometimes, and we had some pretty wild drinkin' sessions... and I mean serious drinkin'."

"Yea, I'm a wild son of a gun," Townes told CountryStyle rather matter-of-factly. "I try not to believe in reincarnation, because, boy, my next life is gonna be murder after the way I acted this time."

Friends told about the time Townes bought a new car and took a friend out for a joyride, demolishing the car — and nearly his life — by driving the vehicle through the front of a bar. After the crumpled debris was kicked out of the way, Townes got out of the car, walked to the bar, and ordered a drink.

Then there was another time at a party when Van Zandt was sitting on a window ledge wondering what it would be like to fall four stories to the ground. Shrug, he let himself drop.

Miraculously, he was unscratched — didn't even spill the wine he carried with him. Friends scurried down in an elevator in shock, and Townes was standing up lighting a cigarette when their rush knocked him down.

"It hurt more being knocked over than falling four stories," says Townes.

When living in Austin three years ago (where radio station polls have Townes coming in third behind Waylon and Willie), on one drinking spree with a musician friend, Townes and his comrade cleverly covered themselves with garbage and went to some of his favorite bars telling kindy go away if they could have \$3 for some vodka.

And then there's the time he performed for an exclusive girls' school and nudged the evening with a nude appearance in the school swimming pool... and the time he shoved a cherry bomb down a toilet, destroying a large portion of a Minnesota dormitory sewer system... and dozens of other tales.

But lately Townes has been mellowing since living in rusticity in a wooden shack some 30 miles south of Nashville. His new wife Cindy (they've been together for five years), keeps him healthy with three meals a day, despite lacking the luxuries of electricity, gas, running water or a phone. And Townes avoids lunacy and finds song inspiration by working around the home and riding his horse across the 800-acres he rents for a measly \$30 a month. Up at six, to bed at nine.

"Cindy's my lady now," says Townes, in a dry, often emotionless manner which leaves one puzzled as to whether he's telling the truth or pulling your leg (you can never really be sure).

"When Cindy's around I stay straight. I'm as serene as they come. But you live a certain way on the road, and on my days off sometimes I get crazy. Every three or four days I go crazy for a day or two."

Actually, Van Zandt's latest outburst into the berserk way back at the 1976 disk jockey convention in Nashville when Jerry Jeff and Townes took over a couple of hospitality suites and ended the night in drunken fun onstage jamming with

Waylon, Guy Clark and others. Townes contributed to the act by making repeated attempts to stand on his head — most of which sent him toppling into drums and microphone stands.

Van Zandt maintains that he's not living very differently now — he's just not getting caught. Not counting traffic violations, it's been three years since his last arrest.

"The formal charge was public drunkenness and disorderly conduct," says Townes, 34 going on 60.

"They caught me. I was sitting on top of a telephone pole with no clothes on in the middle of the night and I refused to come down... I had some clothes on... I had cut-offs on... but I woke up in the morning in jail and I had to go before this lady judge... that was horrible."

"They gave me your basket where you put your wallet and belt and all that. Boy, I couldn't wait to get my basket back because I had like nothin' on me, and I thought I'd have some change — maybe a dollar — and I can get a little half-pint and sober up... I had a basket and a belt — nothing else."

Although lucky to be alive, Townes has never been a fortunate one. He's suffered several broken bones and teeth. "These front four have been changed four times," he says, proudly displaying one of gold. "They've been kicked out of a Mexican, horses and motorcycles." Shortly before beginning a tour to promote his first album in five years ("Flyin' Shoes") on his new label (Tomato), he was riding with a friend ("he wasn't drunk, either") who totaled a truck around a tree, breaking Van Zandt's arm in three places. Townes completed the tour all the same, but with his arm in a cast and for the first time in his life he was left unable to play the guitar.

With goals rarely extending further than hoping to do a good night's set, the gaunt artist isn't bothered by his lack of fame.

And although his work has been placed in the same league as Dylan and Kristofferson, he doesn't resent not having found at least a bit of their popularity. He'd love to have it, but it wouldn't change his lifestyle.

"It's no big deal," he says. "If I was a superstar, I couldn't sit here. But I'd have a Corvette

and a thoroughbred, so why sit here?"

"Willie's smarter than me, you know. It happened to him. For that to happen you gotta be Bob Dylan or Willie or Elvis. I don't have to worry about that. Nobody's gonna recognize me in the street. I'm lucky they don't put me in jail usually — which is what they almost did last night."

"We got busted for two lids of weed, a bottle of brandy and a pint of vodka. They took it all... They knew we were a band. I'm sure they stopped us just to see if we had any drugs, which we didn't... they just told us it was a lousy weed. We just worked for two nights. Ten bucks the job cost."

As long as Van Zandt has money to pay his rent, keep gas in his truck and food on the table, he's financially free. Night's earnings often go to some down-and-out wino on the corner.

"If I were the president," Townes says, with his favorite Tony Perkins stare, "I'd try to feed all the poor people first. Then I'd give all the winos 300 bucks... I know how they feel."

See, the thing is people usually give them 50 cents so they can get one more bottle, right? You give them five bucks, man, they'll kill themselves! They can get high all week guzzling."

The son of a well-bred Fort Worth oil family, with ancestors going back to names on the Texas Constitution, Townes lived in Fort Worth, Montana, Colorado, Chicago and Houston until he was 21. "And then I started traveling," he once quipped.

What looked like a promising future in law was interrupted in college by music and stays in psychiatric wards where he underwent a series of shock treatments.

"I haven't felt the same ever since," says Townes in a way you think he's serious, until he adds, "At night when I'm asleep, my wife says that sometimes sparks come out of my eyes..."

"Yea, I guess you could say I live a colorful life," remarks Van Zandt, sipping down from the last of a Southern Comfort and soda. "Not as colorful as Marlin Perkins, but pretty colorful."

JAMES ALBRECHT

Place Your Bets On Heir to Carson Throne

By PETER J. BOYER
AP Television Writer
LOS ANGELES (AP) — Johnny Carson's impending abdication of his late-night fiefdom has surfaced an entire population of heirs apparent. Anyone who has ever cracked a joke has been mentioned as Carson's replacement on "Tonight."

Bill Cosby, Robert Klein, Martin Mull, Tom Snyder, James Schlesinger, the peanut man at Dodger Stadium — all in the running. Nothing against any of these fellows (especially the peanut man), but I'm betting on one David Letterman, a gap-toothed comic from Indiana.

I'd never heard of the guy until last week, when he hosted a "Tonight" show during one of Carson's many absences. He seemed right, somehow, al-

ready broken-in. Most "Tonight" guest hosts, including some of the best comics in the business, collapse after the monologue. That's because they are comics, not talk show hosts.

Letterman was funny and relaxed during the opening bit, and he carried that composure to the desk with him. He's bright and quick; his humor is subtle, but not invisible. His personality is Midwest pleasant.

He is, like Carson, a natural. Though his resume is rather thin — some guest spots, some comedy writing, some failed pilots — NBC signed Letterman to a two-year exclusive contract a couple of weeks ago, and this week (Wednesday through Friday) he's back on "Tonight." It seems a good time to talk to this guy.

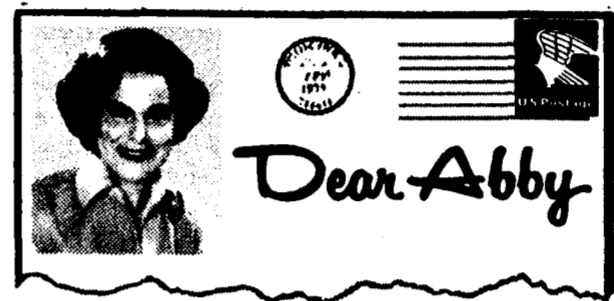
He shows up late, wearing a Hawaiian shirt. He orders a mineral water. He says he jogs. I didn't say he was perfect. Since it isn't exactly good form for a young, relatively unknown comedian to talk with a reporter about the business of taking over Johnny Carson's job, Letterman treads softly. "It would make me really sad if he were to leave the show," he says of Carson. "The only disappointing thing about hosting the show is that Carson isn't there. I would really miss him if he left. There would suddenly be a void. You hate to see him go, and if he does, you realize there's no way you could replace him. It's not even something you consider."

Okay. But surely something is afoot. "Yeah, I get the feeling that something is happening. I sleep a lot less, I wake up in the mornings worried. I'm worried now. I know something is happening. I'm just not certain where it's going to end."

Letterman is a fan of Carson's, and, it seems, a student. Letterman on Carson:

"He's the best, he's the definitive personality for that vehicle. He's very smart, but what I think is more important than anything else is his personna. You like the guy, he's not gonna steer you wrong."

"Carson's your hip friend, who you really like. You kind of wait to see how he goes, then you say, 'Yup, that's right.'" An astute appraisal. I'd suggest it fits Letterman, as well. You like the guy.



His Sex Drive Is No Joyride

By Abigail Van Buren
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DEAR ABBY: I've been married for five months to a 58-year-old sex fiend. If this letter makes no sense it's because I no longer know what a decent night's sleep is. I'm 63 and have been married twice before. I don't want to be a three-time loser, but this man is an absolute machine. His demands are exhausting, but he thinks I should be happy. I am not. I've even told him that I don't need or want all that sex, but he doesn't listen.

I've had a very active life with many interests. I belong to many organizations. I snorkel, paint and am interested in underwater photography, the local aquarium, Hawaiian music and island flowers.

My husband resents my activities. All he wants is me — in bed. And I mean for hours, day and night!

I try to keep a neat apartment and stay on top of my business dealings and correspondence, but now I no longer have the time or energy.

How do I slow this man down?
EXHAUSTED IN HONOLULU

tor to "slow him down." 2) Find a woman who is more his speed.

DEAR ABBY: My husband is an avid sports fan who says I am a jinx. He is convinced that if I am in the same room with him, the team he wants to win will lose. He bases his opinion on past experiences. It's true that when I watch a game with him his team either does poorly or loses, but it's just coincidence, and it's ridiculous for him to label me a jinx. It has gotten to the point where his friends will call him up when their team is losing to ask if I'm watching the game with him.

We have a one-bedroom apartment, so there's nowhere for me to go except the bedroom when he wants to watch a game on TV. I have had enough of his nonsense. He promised to listen to your advice.

JINXED IN PHILLY

DEAR JINX: Get yourself a good luck charm. (A rabbit's foot, four-leaf clover or whatever, and announce that it will counteract the "jinx.") And hang in there. There is as much validity to your theory as there is to hers.

DEAR ABBY: Six months ago I broke up with my live-in girlfriend. (I'll call her Marsha.) After living together for two years, it became obvious that it just wasn't working out. It was a difficult break to make because although I have lost all feeling for Marsha, she still cares for me.

The problem: I have always had great rapport with Marsha's mother — a neat lady whom I call "Mom." I still see her often. She told me frankly that she hoped one day I'd be her son-in-law, but she never pressured me.

My friends tell me I'm wrong to maintain my friendship with Mom since Marsha might think I'm keeping the door open for a possible reconciliation at a later date. Abby, there is absolutely no chance of ever getting back together with Marsha, but I really like her mother.

What do you think?
M. IN CHICAGO

DEAR M.: As long as Marsha still cares for you, I think it's cruel for you to maintain your friendship with her mother. Be kind. Cool it.

If you need help in writing letters of sympathy, congratulations or thank-you letters, get Abby's booklet "How to Write Letters for all Occasions." Send \$1 and a long, stamped (28 cents), self-addressed envelope to Abby: 132 Lasky Dr., Beverly Hills, Calif. 90212.

ACROSS

- 1 Arabian ship
- 5 Fish of the carp family
- 9 Scouting organization (abbr.)
- 12 Bspatter
- 13 Church part
- 14 Thru slowly
- 15 High (Lat.)
- 16 Eating hour (comp. wd.)
- 18 Over there
- 19 Flower plot
- 20 Chips
- 21 Puts to work
- 23 Forbid
- 25 Regurgitate
- 27 Plunder
- 31 Recedes
- 32 Chicago mayor
- 33 Farewell (abbr.)
- 34 Bishopric
- 35 One-tenth (prefix)
- 36 British press
- 37 Dictatorship (abbr.)
- 38 Hostelry
- 40 Cove
- 41 Tropical fruit
- 42 Sheltered glen
- 45 Trim off branches

DOWN

- 46 Mountains (abbr.)
- 49 Juvenile
- 52 Business agreement
- 53 Graduate of Annapolis (abbr.)
- 54 Isn't (sl.)
- 55 Information (abbr.)
- 56 Television receiver
- 57 Bodies of water
- 58 Feminine (suffix)
- 11 Lincoln and Fortas
- 17 Spanks
- 19 Wager
- 22 Family member
- 23 Indonesian island
- 24 No matter which
- 25 Waistcoat
- 26 Fulfill a command
- 27 Spicy
- 28 Decrease
- 29 Plant part
- 30 Ship's backbone
- 32 Contradict
- 35 Genetic material (abbr.)
- 36 Period
- 38 Befriend
- 39 Fortune
- 41 Ignorant people
- 42 Colors
- 43 First-rate (comp. wd.)
- 44 Craving
- 45 Moon goddess
- 47 27th president
- 48 Blackthorn fruit
- 50 Auxiliary verb
- 51 Shame
- 52 Small cube

Answer to Previous Puzzle

ACROSS

- 1 Housewife's title (abbr.)
- 4 Wrong (prefix)
- 7 Russian fighter plane
- 10 Time period (abbr.)
- 11 Noun suffix (comp. wd.)
- 12 First-rate
- 14 Feeling
- 16 Unlikely
- 18 Gain a victory
- 19 Actor Mineo (abbr.)
- 22 Crazy
- 24 Gents
- 25 You (archaic)
- 26 Eggs
- 27 Tremble
- 29 Helping
- 31 Fabulist
- 35 Rider (var.)
- 36 Sleeping sickness fly
- 37 Australian city
- 40 Jesus monogram
- 41 God (Lat.)
- 44 Gender
- 45 Exclamation of annoyance
- 46 Time zone (abbr.)
- 47 African nation
- 51 Radioactive element
- 55 Forearm bone
- 56 Baseballer Gehrig
- 57 Depression initials
- 58 Consume
- 59 Domestic animal
- 60 National Product (abbr.)
- 1 Madam (abbr.)
- 2 Wheel edge
- 3 Flake precipitation (comp. wd.)
- 4 My (Ger.)
- 5 Same (prefix)
- 6 Dated
- 7 Handle roughly
- 8 Atomic particle
- 9 Grind with teeth (abbr.)
- 13 Smallsword
- 15 Golf gadget
- 20 Plus
- 22 Bird
- 23 Profess
- 24 Clean a floor
- 25 Source of wood
- 27 Flat-bottomed boat
- 28 Child's play
- 30 Minus
- 32 Mixing
- 33 Safety agency (abbr.)
- 34 Destructive insect
- 36 Cowboy's nickname
- 38 Energy-saving time (abbr.)
- 39 Snuggle
- 41 Demilitarized zone (abbr.)
- 42 Jacob's brother
- 43 Useful
- 45 Women's patriotic society (abbr.)
- 47 Dinner course
- 48 Grimace
- 50 Genetic material
- 52 In what way
- 53 Vase
- 54 Graphic layout

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