

Unfinished Business

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By Tom Whalen

Randy leaned into the microphone. “And that’s it for me, Randy Bachman, lead singer of Bachman-Turner Overdrive and one-time member of the Guess Who. No sugar tonight in my coffee, I’ve gotta get up early tomorrow!” The On Air sign switched off as the studio door swung open and his assistant entered. “Brilliant show, Mr. Bachman. Starting and ending the show with Hotel California was a stroke of genius!” Bachman chortled. “Don’t mind me, just takin’ care of business. Now if you excuse me, I’ve got an important meeting to attend.”

“Mind if I tag along?” said a voice from the other room. It was his son, Tal Bachman. “Tal, I’d love nothing more.” They were whisked away by their driver to an exclusive club on the top floor of the CN Tower. When they arrived they were greeted by a cavalcade of Canadian rockers: Chad Kroeger, Derek Whibley, Madchild, Snow, and Shawn Desman. “Boys, this is my son Tal. Tal, meet the boys.” The group cheered and raised their glasses in a toast. “Another round of boilermakers for Canada’s finest musicmakers!” shouted Chad. The table roared. “So Randy,” Madchild started, “what’s goin on?”

“Well boys, I am in a bit of a pickle. You see Tal, the real reason I brought you here is because you haven’t had a hit in years.” Tal’s grin slowly faded. “But don’t worry! I’ve called upon my merry group of musicians to help you out. We’ll write a hit that’ll put you back on the charts.” Snow interjected: “I know of someone who can help you with TV placement deals too. Get that song on primetime.” Randy smiled and patted his son’s shoulder. “Dad...”, Tal began. “You know all I want to do is cook. The music thing was fun but it’s time to get real now. I really think I have a shot at this culinary school.” Tal pulled out a brochure but Randy brushed it aside. “Listen Tal. I’ve already put a lot of money behind this. Let’s not complicate things.”

There was an awful hush at the table. After what seemed like ages, Snow piped up. “You could sing about food.” Randy lit up. “That’s perfect!” Snow continued: “And like, you like to eat food but you also like to make it. Maybe you even get mad when you see other people eating your food; cause like you wanna eat it.” Shawn Desman was scribbling down notes, both of the list and musical variety. Derek interjected: “Do you know anyone in Hollywood? I have a few friends. We could knock together a pilot, work Tal’s food thing into it, maybe even have him sing on the show.” Randy was pounding his hand on the table. “I’m looooving it,” he howled. Tal looked hopeful, but deep down inside he knew he would never get to be a real chef. Only a dancing chef who sang about wanting to prepare and eat food.

Two weeks later, Randy and Tal are in Hollywood. The pilot has been greenlit and they're meeting with the network to discuss the script. "For the most part, we love what you've come up with. Cookin' Up Trouble is a great title, and Tal's in the prime position for a comeback." Randy grabbed his son's hand, a hopeful gesture. "But..." the executive continued, "we don't think he'd be strong enough to carry this sitcom by himself." Tal had his head in his hands. "But don't worry Tal, you'll still be in the show. Randy, you should be the lead character. Here's what I'm thinking..."

The network exec unveiled a Powerpoint slide that read UNFINISHED BUSINESS. "Pretty cool, huh?" Randy was speechless, either out of joy or shock. "Basically, it's a sitcom about Randy and his eccentric kids. He supports his children in their endeavors and every so often he rocks out with his rockstar friends. Then one day, while Randy is trying to play the world's largest electric guitar, it falls on him and he's crushed to death. Now he's gotta roam the Spirit Realm and uncover the 50 Holy Guitar Strings so he can return to Earth in time for supper." Tal was silent. "We can CG most of it." Production began the following month.

On a bright and early Monday morning, an SUV limo sped to the studio lot to film the pilot episode of Unfinished Business. Randy Bachman took his phone away from his ear for a second and turned to Tal. "You all ready for this, sport? It's gonna be fuuun!" Tal faked a smile. "Buddy, this is gonna open so many doors for you it'll be unbelievable."

"Yeah I'm sure it will, Dad." Tal sounded unconvinced. Randy frowned. "Listen, if it's about your character, we can finesse that too. I really wanna make this work for ya, champ." Randy leaned in and gave Tal a soft punch on his shoulder. "And just to give us a little bit of extra leverage, I brought some buddies along." He pointed to a car driving alongside their limo. The car had a camera sticking out the window. "We're filming the intro for our new making-of reality TV show, 'Give 'Em The (Unfinished) Business: Roll on Down the Highway!' Working title."

Tal was beginning to panic. He was breathing heavily as his eyes began to dart around. His father had trapped him. "I forged your signature for the release. I thought we could finally spend some quality time together." Utter terror in the blackness of Tal's heart shot out and he started to scream – until he heard a guitar riff he recognized. The PA system was blaring a classic BTO tune and Tal crumpled to the ground. Randy opened the sunroof and climbed onto the roof. As the limo sped down the highway he belted out the chorus "Let it roll! Down the highway! With my son! I love my son! Woah! Woah! Yeeeah!"

At the studio lot Tal was hyperventilating. The shoot was delayed by a half-hour so they could film interview segments with Randy and Tal. The interviewer began with Tal: "What did you think when your father, Randy Bachman, of Bachman-Turner Overdrive and the Guess Who, lept on top of his

limo and rocked a tune?” In the edit, Tal’s response was this: “I’ve always known him as a bit of a wild man. But you gotta understand, as a father, he’s top-notch too. All I can say is the rockstar apple doesn’t fall far from the rockstar tree.” Randy watched playback from the monitor and nodded. “And the good part is that it makes him look okay too.”

Suddenly a PA dashed into the edit suite. “Mr. Bachman, there’s been an accident.” Randy looked confused. “What happened?” “Sir. It’s... it’s Tal. The guitar, the prop we were using for the World’s Biggest Guitar..” Randy interjected: “But we haven’t even shot that scene yet!” “No, you don’t understand.. we can’t shoot it anymore.” Randy became very cross. “Why not?! Don’t tell me you’ve wasted our budget.. don’t tell me you’ve screwed this all up! This is make or break for me. Now... what happened to Tal?”

“He was crushed to death by the World’s Biggest Guitar. He did it to himself. He said you made him do it.” Randy was dumbfounded. “But I don’t understand... he’s my son!” The PA struggled to find an explanation. “Take me to him!” They dashed to the set.

Tal was still beneath the gigantic electric guitar, crushed to death, but in a peaceful way. There was an odd calm for a moment, no one said a word. The reality show cameras zoomed in. Randy took a deep breath and looked around.

“Why, Tal. Of all the people in the world. Why didn’t they take me instead.” Tears welled up in his eyes. “Why didn’t they take ME! Take ME! I’m finished!” A PA approached to give him a hug but he cheated out to the side and whispered in his ear. “You’re ruining the shot.” The PA apologized. “It’s ok, let’s just, we’ll take it from ‘I’m finished’ and just try not to interfere too much. Like the sympathetic team thing is good, it’s a good angle, it’s just like, you should know your role and.. well if you are gonna improvise just let me know ahead of time. Ok? What’s your name. Robby? Alright Robby tell you what.”

He was still whispering as he looked around. He saw a tearful cast, he saw a crew for his sitcom and a crew for his reality show, but most importantly he saw his own son, crushed to death by an oversized guitar prop. But Randy being Randy, he also saw opportunity. He turned back to Robby. “You can be my son. I can make you my son. You wanna be Robby Bachman?”

Robby’s expression was hard to read, mainly because he was sobbing so heavily. But through the tears he let out a croaky “yes”, and Randy officially welcomed him into the Bachman clan. “Oh, and Robby,” he said. “I’ve got an idea for your first hit single: a cover of your late brother’s most famous song.”

“Anything you say. Pops.”

