

"Spirit Of Wrestling" - The Voice Of The Heart

Monday, 03 April 2006

It was on a mountainous highway somewhere between Asheville, NC and Chattanooga, TN that I called him, a windy road flanked by rock and evergreen that never fails to uplift and inspire. I was drifting between a view and a vision, one which needed nurturing, needed support, needed others to help bring to life.

"Are you available for a shoot on this Tuesday?" I posed.

"If it's late in the day or in the evening," replied the voice on the other end of the cell phone.

"Busy that day?"

"I am having surgery on my throat in the morning," he replied.

"Really? Are you going under anesthesia?"

"Yes. For about four hours. But if you need me that night I will be there. Won't be able to talk, though."

Won't be able to talk. Hmm.

We decided to push the shoot back a day until Wednesday. Then as I peered back out at the stunning vista I was hit with a far more striking revelation: Eric Young cared so much about being part of an idea, so much about partaking in a project for the one thing he loves most, that he was willing to show up groggy and delirious just hours after a undergoing a serious medical procedure. That is testament to his passion and commitment and heart.

And that is the beauty of TNA and the young rising stars who call TNA home.

It is about possibility.

It is about taking risks.

It is about walking tiny steps but making indelible footprints.

As it turned out, Eric Young wouldn't have been able to participate on the shoot Tuesday night if he wanted to. After the operation, he suffered serious complications. His breathing unexpectedly stopped for ten minutes while he was in the recovery room. He was put on life support and kept overnight. He nearly died.

"The scariest thing is that I nearly died yet I don't remember a single thing," he recalls. "I just woke up like normal, but they wouldn't let me leave the hospital. It's never happened before. But now it will be in the back of my mind the next time I go under the knife."

Eric Young suffers from papilloma, an incurable virus that causes recurring growths on his vocal chords. In the past year and a half he has had six operations to treat this problem. He will undergo dozens more over the years. Sadly, one day he may lose his voice altogether.

The voice of his heart, however, will always speak volumes.

"I just love this business," he proclaims with genuine passion. "I just want to wrestle at a high level for as long as I can. There is nothing more I want to do, nothing else I want to become."

They say that to truly understand a man's heart one should not look not at what he has attained, but rather, at what he aspires to do. Eric is eager and ambitious and dedicates his life to the fully and wholly to the world of professional wrestling. Success for him is neither titles nor trophies, rather longevity in the one thing he has loves most.

His passion and caring were clearly on display while filming the black-and-white "Fritz Fellinni" short film for the opening of Destination X. That night he gave an incredible performance as the mime wearing a Sting mask walking the empty streets with a small TV.

I enjoy Eric Young's persona, but that night I learned to admire his spirit, too.

That night we had no permits or storyboards or agendas. That night the three of us (Andrew Thomas was there, too) came up with most of the images on the fly. Our "special effects" department consisted of the three of us taking turns getting down on all fours on the grimy streets of Nashville's historic Printer's Alley, blowing paper napkins through the frame. It was an unglamorous and dirty job. But we were delirious with glee and enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the unmistakable voice of the heart. The streets dirtied our hands and stained our clothes, but they welcomed us, too, rewarding us with timeless pictures and lasting moments. The joys of that collaborative endeavor are forever embedded in our hearts.

And it was mostly due to the spirit of Eric Young. That night, he starred, ironically, as a mime in a silent film.

But the magic of that evening will always endure with an immutable voice of its own.