

MY NAME IS EARL
"The Tri-County Skynyrd Invitational"

by
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ACT ONE

FADE IN:

EXT. SMALL-TOWN STREET - DAY

EARL rushes down the street carrying a BOX OF MECHANICAL PARTS.

EARL (V.O.)
Number two hundred and fifty-four
on my list: "Wrecked a hovercraft
that was not mine."

EXT. DITCH - DAY - FLASHBACK

Earl, covered in mud, engine oil, etc., clambers out of a ditch.

In the background, thick black smoke blows by, and something off-camera SPUTTERS and GRINDS.

Two COPS (one is named "Warren") wait for Earl at ground level.

EARL
Hi, Warren.

WARREN
Earl.
(a nod to the smoke)
This you?

Earl nods, holds out his wrists. Warren pulls out HANDCUFFS.

CUT TO:

INT. MECHANICS' SHOP - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

A grubby shop floor -- tools, car parts, a pin-up calendar.

XENA (from "O Karma, Where Art Thou?") fixes a button on her BRIGHT, SPARKLY DRESS.

An OLD MAN (from "Fixed a Football Game") carefully puts a TIARA on her head. (His HAT and COAT sit on a nearby table.)

Earl rushes in, totally winded, box in hand --

EARL
I got 'em! I got all the parts!

XENA

Earl! You're too late.

Earl is all kinds of disappointed.

FRANK (O.S.)

Try it now, Clel!

Offscreen, a MOTOR REVS UP.

Onscreen a light WIND KICKS UP.

Earl just looks puzzled; everyone else CHEERS.

FRANK (22), a mechanic, enters. The motor turns off again.

EARL

You already --

FRANK

After you told me about your list,
we all decided to pitch in and fix
the hovercraft.

OLD MAN

I paid for brand-new parts myself!

EARL

Wow.

FRANK

Looks like we got it fixed just in
time for --
(snuggles Xena)
-- my new girlfriend's parade!

XENA

And it's all because of Earl
Hickey!

Earl pulls out his list, crosses off the item.

EARL

Now, I'm just tryin' to make things
right.

Frank and Xena exit the way Frank came in.

The old man picks up his hat and coat.

OLD MAN

Shame I can't stay and chat, but
I'm judging for the TCSI.

This gets Earl's attention.

EARL
"TCSI?"

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

A teenage garage band plays "SWAMP ROCK" BY LYNRYD SKYNYRD: YOUNG EARL (vocals), YOUNG HANDSOME RON (bass), YOUNG HAPPY EDDIE (guitar), and YOUNG MAD DOG MIKE (drums).

Handsome Ron stands rock-steady, in a cheap New-Wave-looking suit, skinny tie, and neatly-trimmed hair.

Happy Eddie (always) looks depressed -- he wears all black.

Mad Dog Mike pounds the hell out of the drums, his rage not so much contained as channeled.

They're raucous and not-entirely-bad.

EARL (V.O.)
Karma was tellin' me it was time to
fix number one hundred eighty-nine:
"Ruined Tapewölf's chances at fame
and fortune."

INSERT: A childish drawing of a wolf that, at its midsection, cross-fades to a chain of rectangles. Above it is the word "Tapewolf" in spiky letters.

EARL (V.O.)
We named our band "Tapewölf", after
a mythical beast that was half
wolf, half tapeworm.

A hand reaches into frame and draws an umlaut over the 'o'.

EARL (V.O.)
The little dots were purely
decorative.

BACK TO SCENE

The band does the big finish. Young Earl drops to his knees, hits a high note; the other three flail at their instruments.

EARL (V.O.)
 It was me, Handsome Ron, Mad Dog
 Mike, and -- of course -- Happy
 Eddie.

CUT TO:

INT. HANDSOME RON'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Cheap furniture, but it still looks kind of swanky.

Young Handsome Ron looks at a sheet of paper spooling out of
 a FAX MACHINE.

EARL (V.O.)
 But creative differences forced me
 to break up the band. Right before
 our big break:

The sheet reads: "YOUR FIRED -- Earl" [sic].

EARL (V.O.)
 The TCSI.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

Earl has the phone up to his ear. He's on hold.

At the table, Randy tries to bounce nickels into a SHOT GLASS
 and CATALINA looks at a few TAPES sitting next to a BOOMBOX.

CATALINA
 What's a "TCSI"?

RANDY
 It's the Tri-County Skynyrd
 Invitational.

CATALINA
 What's a 'Skynyrd'?

Randy's jaw drops.

Earl's jaw drops.

The phone SQUAWKS SOMETHING at Earl -- it has to do so
 repeatedly before it gets his attention.

EARL

Sorry, what's the name of Happy
Eddie's parole officer?

(beat)

Yeah, I'll hold.

RANDY

Skynyrd is -- it's a celebration of
everything that's pure and good.
Like friendship, and Alabama... and
Skynyrd.

Randy gets lost in this circular thought.

Catalina picks up a tape.

CATALINA

Is this Mr. Skynyrd?

No reply -- Randy is still having his Zen moment.

Catalina pops the tape in, and "TUESDAY'S GONE" PLAYS.

Catalina GASPS.

RANDY

Cool, huh?

CATALINA

This was an old folk ballad in my
village!

EARL

(still on phone)

Did he leave a forwarding address
at the jail? Yes, I'll hold.

CATALINA

They said it was a song about the
chupacabra!

EARL

You'll call back tomorrow?

(sighs)

Okay.

Earl hangs up.

CATALINA

My village is full of plagiarists!

Earl, with no context for that line, is terribly confused.

EARL
They try layin' traps?

CUT TO:

EXT. CLUB CHUBBY'S - SIDE DOOR - NIGHT

A plain brick exterior with a metal door that opens out to an alley. Faint THUMPING MUSIC.

MAD DOG MIKE (30's) hauls a DRUNKEN PATRON out through the door. Mike hasn't aged well, but still looks like he could kick your ass.

EARL (V.O.)
Lucky for us, Mad Dog Mike was easy to find, since he was the bouncer at Club Chubby's.

The drunken patron staggers out into the alley.

DRUNKEN PATRON
I'm sorry I caused a problem.

MAD DOG MIKE
Hey, man -- you wanna fight me?

DRUNKEN PATRON
God, no.

MAD DOG MIKE
C'mon.

DRUNKEN PATRON
No.

MAD DOG MIKE
Please?

DRUNKEN PATRON
There's my cab.

MAD DOG MIKE
(demonstrating)
I'll hold one arm behind my back.

Earl and Randy approach Mike, Randy hanging behind. The drunken patron staggers rapidly out of the alley.

EARL (V.O.)

Mad Dog Mike wanted a job that
channeled his boundless rage, but
it didn't quite work out.

MAD DOG MIKE

Earl Hickey!

EARL

Mad Dog!

MAD DOG MIKE

You wanna fight?

We see (in pantomime) the same routine -- Mad Dog Mike pleading, putting one arm behind his back, putting both arms behind his back -- while Earl steadily refuses. Meanwhile, Earl explains --

EARL (V.O.)

I asked him if he wanted to play
drums again.

The routine stops. Mike hugs Earl.

MAD DOG MIKE

Absolutely!

Earl looks uncomfortable.

Randy just stares through the doorway as a boa flies out through it.

CUT TO:

EXT. USED CAR DEALERSHIP - DAY

Earl, Randy, and Mad Dog Mike enter a grubby, low-rent used-car dealership.

EARL (V.O.)

Next up: Handsome Ron.

CUT TO:

INT. HANDSOME RON'S OFFICE - DAY

HANDSOME RON (30's) tries to look like the smooth, gigolo type, but has neither the looks, funds, nor hair (despite a valiant comb-over) to pull it off. He carries himself like it's all working perfectly, though.

His office is cheap and cluttered.

A faded "Salesman of the Month" CERTIFICATE hangs on the wall.

Handsome Ron sits at his desk, which has PAPERS, an OLD COMPUTER, FAMILY SNAPSHOTS, and BITS OF KITSCHY ROCK'N'ROLL MEMORABILIA.

Earl and Mike sit across from him. Randy sits on the floor, fascinated by a small MODEL CAR on the desk.

HANDSOME RON
Absolutely not.

MAD DOG MIKE
Aw, Handsome Ron --

EARL
But what about --

HANDSOME RON
I've got everything I want in life.
The clothes, the job, the sweet
ride... what am I supposed to get
out of Tapewölf?

Earl picks up one of the bits of memorabilia.

Meanwhile, Randy very slowly reaches for the model car.

EARL
Handsome Ron -- does any of this --
(gesturing at the office)
-- rock?

HANDSOME RON
(fighting back tears)
No.

Everyone notices Randy reaching for the model car.

RANDY
May I play with the li'l car?

Handsome Ron nods, still upset.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAB SHACK - DAY

Earl, Randy, Mad Dog Mike, and Handsome Ron enter the crab shack.

Signage out front: "Coming Soon: TCSI!"

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - DAY

Earl, Randy, Mad Dog Mike, and Handsome Ron sit on one side of a table.

HAPPY EDDIE (30's) sits opposite them.

He wears a Well-Mart employee uniform. (Similar to Wal*Mart, but hopefully lawsuit-resistant.) It has bits of cheerful flair: a smiley-face pin, an "Ed!" name tag, a tag that reads, "At Well-Mart, the smiles are free!", etc.

They contrast markedly with his dour, frowning face.

HAPPY EDDIE
Rock'n'roll reminds me of failure.

Everyone GROANS.

HAPPY EDDIE
Things'll turn out bad again!

HANDSOME RON
But you're a great singer!

EARL
Well -- Happy Eddie's a great
guitar-player, that's for sure.

RANDY
It'll be fun!

Mad Dog Mike just stares at Happy Eddie; he carefully makes a fist with his right hand over and over.

EARL
Mad Dog Mike -- we're doin' "plan
B".

HAPPY EDDIE
Wh-- what's "Plan B"?!

Mad Dog Mike gets up out of his seat. He towers over Happy Eddie. Mad Dog Mike stomps towards Happy Eddie...

... then past him, and across the floor to the jukebox.

He puts two coins in, presses a couple of buttons.

SKYNYRD'S "WHISKEY ROCK-A-ROLLER" STARTS PLAYING.

RANDY
Ooh! Speech time.

Randy clambers over to the seat next to Happy Eddie.

EARL
Happy Eddie -- karma has told me
that I have to make this right.
And so, it's appointed me, Earl, to
lead us to victory in the
Invitational. This time we're
gonna be rich and famous.
(sung along to jukebox)
Well, I'm a whiskey rock-a-roller --

EARL, HANDSOME RON, AND MAD DOG MIKE
(singing)
*That's what I am
Women, whiskey, and miles of
travellin'
Is all I understand --*

HAPPY EDDIE
Okay! Okay.
(doubtful)
I'll give it a shot.

The SONG CONTINUES as we --

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS

(A) Happy Eddie blows some dust off of his old GUITAR CASE,
coughs and winces.

(B) Mad Dog Mike pulls his DRUMSTICKS off of a shelf of ANGER-
MANAGEMENT SELF-HELP BOOKS.

(C) Handsome Ron pulls his VAN out of his garage.

(D) Earl puts on his "Lucky Skynyrd Shirt" (the Skynyrd shirt
Earl wears frequently throughout the series).

EARL (V.O.)
Things were lookin' up. I even put
on my lucky Skynyrd shirt for good
luck.

CUT TO:

EXT. HANDSOME RON'S GARAGE - DAY

Earl, Randy, Handsome Ron, Mad Dog Mike, and Happy Eddie approach Handsome Ron's garage. (The van is parked nearby.)

EARL (V.O.)
Ron offered his garage for
rehearsals.

Handsome Ron points a GARAGE DOOR OPENER at it, presses the button, and the door lifts, revealing:

CUT TO:

INT. HANDSOME RON'S GARAGE - DAY

It's set up with old-looking instruments: a drumkit, a guitar, a bass, and a microphone. There is a DISCO BALL hanging from the ceiling, and SHELVES OF BOXES lining one wall, and a TRASH BIN.

EARL (V.O.)
A garage which I'd once tried to
rob.

CUT TO:

INT. HANDSOME RON'S GARAGE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Randy and Earl tiptoe through the same garage, only it's empty, and they're dressed in black.

Randy pulls a few old issues of *Rolling Stone* out of one of the boxes. We might see an article about "Stillwater" (Jason Lee's band from *Almost Famous*) listed on one of the magazine covers.

Earl examines the trash bin.

RANDY
He's got a lotta magazines about
the Rolling Stones.

EARL
(opening trash)
Randy, can you turn on a light?

Randy looks around.

EARL (V.O.)
That led to some bad memories. But
lucky for me, the music took my
mind off it.

INT. HANDSOME RON'S GARAGE - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

THE BAND PLAYS "DOWN SOUTH JUKIN'", but they sound AWFUL.

Randy sits on the driveway, puzzled.

A SUBURBAN KID walks by, sees the band, sits next to Randy.

The band finishes.

Randy and the kid applaud tentatively.

SUBURBAN KID
(quietly)
Y'all are gonna lose.

RANDY
(quietly)
Yup.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

EXT. CRAB SHACK - DAY

Darnell puts up a sign that reads: "TCSI Starts Tomorrow Night! Featuring 'El Leonardo Skeonardo'".

EARL (V.O.)

While my band practiced, Darnell got the venue ready.

CUT TO:

INT. CIVIC MEETING ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

DARNELL puts on a presentation for several MEMBERS OF THE CIVIC BOARD.

Behind him is a whiteboard. Written on it:

crab shack

advantages:

* *crabs*

* *jukebox (has skynyrd)*

* *everybody knows how to get there*

EARL (V.O.)

He somehow convinced the locals to put on the contest at the crab shack.

BOARD MEMBER #1

But you don't even *like* Skynyrd!

GASPS from the board members.

Darnell shrugs.

DARNELL

I'm more of a Motörhead guy.

The board members AD LIB their grudging acceptance.

DARNELL

But I promise it'll be the best Tri-County Skynyrd Invitational since 1994.

The board members AD LIB their disbelief.

DARNELL
Or... since 2002.

The board members AD LIB that that sounds much more reasonable.

Board Member #1 shakes Darnell's hand, and the other members APPLAUD.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

A frenzy of activity. A BANDSTAND occupies one half of the venue, and the chairs are rearranged to face it. By the bandstand, two WORKERS put up a large sign which reads:

Rules:

1. *FBing is a 5-point deduction.*
2. *No bottle-throwin.*
3. *Judges decisions are FINAL!!!*

By the bar, three other WORKERS assemble a LARGE GLASS CASE.

Joy tears through, and snaps to get the attention of one of the workers with the sign.

JOY
We done changed that to a *ten-point* deduction for FBing, ever since that "Free Bird Overdose" in 2004.

WORKER #1
Oh, yeah.

The workers take the sign down, dispirited.

Darnell enters, carrying an OLD JACKET.

DARNELL
I got the Winner's Jacket!

All work stops. Everyone admires the jacket, AD LIBS various expressions of awe.

EARL (V.O.)
Sure, there was a cash prize for winning the contest, but the real prize was getting to wear the winner's jacket -- a jacket worn by singer Ronnie VanZant at no less than three different shows.

JOY
 What y'all doin'? Y'ain't gettin'
 paid to drool!

Work resumes. Darnell hands off the jacket to the glass-case workers. Joy takes Darnell aside.

JOY
 Darnell, I done found out you let
 Earl take parts from our trailer!

DARNELL
 Baby. He gave'm right back.

JOY
 To fix somebody's *hover-crafty*?

DARNELL
 It's karma, Joy. He's doin' good.

JOY
 That don't mean he can take our
 good and give it to the town
 parade!

DARNELL
 Just promise me you'll be fair to
 him when you're judging the
 contest.

JOY
 He's entering the contest?!

Darnell nods.

JOY
 (sinister)
 Well. This 'karma' thing's a hoot,
 ain't it?

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - DUSK

Rehearsal has been going on a while. The band, exhausted, bangs the last chord of a "Down South Jukin'".

The suburban kid, and a dozen of his FRIENDS, sit quietly in the driveway, watching. Randy sits with them.

EARL
I'll be honest. That wasn't good
enough.

MAD DOG MIKE
I *knew* it!

HAPPY EDDIE
We should just give up.

EARL
Give up?! Karma wants us to win
this contest. And karma wants us
to practice another hour or two
before goin' home.

The others are alarmed, but they go along with it.

The band starts the song again.

One of the kid's friends yawns and departs down the street.

EARL
It's gonna be great!

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - NIGHT

Catalina sits at the little table, reading a SKYNYRD-RELATED
LIBRARY BOOK (titled *Lynyrd Skynyrd and Post-Feminism: A New
Approach*).

There's a whole STACK OF SKYNYRD-RELATED LIBRARY BOOKS on the
table.

Earl paces.

EARL
Tapewölf sucks! There's no way
we'll win anything!

Randy emerges from the bathroom, doing a series of dance
moves. They're actually Four-Tops-style dance moves, but out
of context, it just looks random.

CATALINA
Rock'n'roll is hard work, Earl.
Allen Collins had to do three hours
of takes for his solo on "Free
Bird". Just tell them to work
harder!

EARL
 Yeah, I could --
 (notices Randy)
 Randy, what are you doing?

RANDY
 (still dancin')
 Practicing.

CATALINA
 Practicing what?

Randy stops and goes back to the bathroom door.

Then he does all the Four-Tops-style moves in place, while vocalizing various OOHS and AAHS.

He sounds pretty good.

Catalina and Earl have no idea what he's doing.

RANDY
 I'm gonna be a backup singer! For
 Tapewölf! It'll be great --

EARL
 Randy, *I'm* the singer in this
 family --

RANDY
 But I wanna contribute.

Earl thinks about this for a second.

CUT TO:

INT./EXT. EARL'S CAR/STRIP MALL PARKING LOT - THE NEXT DAY

Randy waits in the passenger seat as Earl returns from a small, run-down strip mall with a PAPER BAG.

EARL (V.O.)
 So I found a way for Randy to
 contribute.

Earl gets in the car, and hands Randy the bag.

RANDY
 For me?

Randy opens the bag and finds... A DRUMSTICK and A COWBELL.

RANDY

Wow!

He BEATS THE HOLY HELL OUT OF IT, with no rhythm at all.

Earl recoils.

EARL

Randy, you just play it real quiet.

Earl starts the car.

Randy plays the cowbell as quietly as possible, engrossed.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT

MARIACHI MUSIC plays.

Signage: "First night of TCSI tonight! (dollar off PBR)"

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT

A MARIACHI BAND plays a mariachi version of "Sweet Home Alabama".

The judges -- JOY, the OLD MAN, and a nebbish-looking SKYNYRD EXPERT -- sit right next to the stage. They each wear a "Judge" tag.

Earl, Randy (with his cowbell), and the band enter.

EARL (V.O.)

We took a short break from rehearsals to check out the competition.

The song finishes up.

JOY

Well that's ten points off for a meandering solo that didn't go nowhere.

MARIACHI #1

She's got a point, Gary.

Joy notices Earl and crosses to him.

EARL
 (a bit oily)
 So, looks like I know a judge!

JOY
 Do you want a repeat of "The
 Judging Scandal of '96"? And
 besides, you done me wrong so many
 times since you started on this
 'list', you shouldn't ought to be
 smilin' like that.

EARL
 But karma is --

JOY
 Karma is sayin' it's payback time.

Joy goes back to her seat. Earl just smiles, smugly.

EARL (V.O.)
 Obviously, Joy was uncomfortable
 with the fact that all those years,
 she might have been married to a
 'rock god' and never even known it.

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - THE NEXT DAY

Ron cuts out mid-song to take a cell phone call.

EARL (V.O.)
 But it turns out, rock'n'roll is
hard when you're a grown-up.

Earl wrestles Ron's phone from him.

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - LATER

MAD DOG MIKE
 Guys, I gotta work tonight at Club
 Chubby's.

EARL
 Just call in sick.

MAD DOG MIKE
 (dubious)
 On Tequila Night?

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - LATER

Happy Eddie nurses his hand in pain.

HAPPY EDDIE
 My hand hurts.

EARL
 Just play through it!

HANDSOME RON
 Do you want him to hurt himself?

EARL
 Handsome Ron, *karma* wants Happy
 Eddie to play through the pain.

HAPPY EDDIE
 Well, okay.

They go back to playing.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY

Earl goes over a schedule scrawled on a sheet of paper.

Next to the bathroom, Randy tries to synchronize his Four-Tops-style moves with playing the cowbell. (It works poorly.)

The PHONE RINGS as Catalina RUSHES into the room.

Earl is about to answer the phone when Catalina SNAGS it.

CATALINA
 Hello?
 (short pause)
 Yes?
 (short pause)
 YES! Thank you!

She hangs up.

CUT TO:

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

The old man is pushed along a gurney, looking like death, and stone unconscious.

EARL (V.O.)

Turns out when Mike took the day off, the old man dropped by the club, drank enough tequila to kill an elephant, and landed in the hospital. This left a job opening.

CUT TO:

INT. HOTEL ROOM - DAY - BACK TO PRESENT

CATALINA

I am now a TCSI judge!

RANDY

That's great, Catalina!

Catalina GASPS.

CATALINA

Wait -- I can't fraternize with you.

EARL

We don't want a repeat of '96.

RANDY

Yeah.

CATALINA

(exiting)

Bye, guys! Good luck!

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - DAY

Randy, cowbell in hand, does a trust fall -- he falls over backwards, and Happy Eddie, Mad Dog Mike, and Handsome Ron all catch him. They're having great fun.

Earl enters, stressed out.

EARL
 What are you guys doing?! It's
 showtime -- *we've gotta get ready.*

Crestfallen, they break it up.

CUT TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS:

(A) In Handsome Ron's garage, Randy sands down the tip of his drumstick, taps it on the cowbell, is satisfied with the sound.

(B) At the hotel, Earl picks a few bits of lint off his "lucky Skynyrd shirt" and chooses between two nearly-identical TRUCKER'S CAPS.

(C) In Handsome Ron's driveway, Mad Dog Mike sits and reads one of his anger-management self-help books. The suburban kid reads over his shoulder.

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - DAY

Handsome Ron pulls up his van. The others load equipment into it.

Randy absently knocks over a BASS GUITAR ON A STAND.

Earl jumps across the garage and catches it from hitting the ground.

But we hear a RIP.

Earl looks down. He's torn his lucky shirt.

EARL
 Craaa --

Halfway through the word "crap", Earl's voice cuts out, and we only hear exhaling breath.

Randy jumps to his side.

RANDY
 What happened?

Earl desperately tries to mime "I lost my voice."

RANDY
You tore your shirt.

Earl looks really desperately sad now, as he keeps miming.

RANDY
It's okay, Earl. I don't think it
really had that much luck anyway.

The rest of the band gathers 'round.

RANDY
And rippin' it might not hurt the
luck none. Might even make it
luckier.

Earl is still trying to mime. It's turning into charades.

HAPPY EDDIE
Wait a minute -- four words?

RANDY
Wait, it's -- "I lost my voice!"

YESSS! Earl grins and points at Randy.

The band cheers, but then realizes what that means.

Off the band's panicked and stunned response --

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - NIGHT

Everything's loaded into the van.

Randy carefully mixes BOURBON and HONEY in a glass, and feeds a spoonful of it to Earl. Earl looks grim and determined.

Mad Dog Mike, Handsome Ron, and Happy Eddie all look on, concerned.

EARL (V.O.)

Karma had thrown us a curve ball by taking away my voice the night that Tapewölf had to perform at the contest. But we weren't gonna take that lying down.

EARL

(croaking)

I can still do this.

Everyone but Randy looks doubtful.

RANDY

Yeah! And Earl -- check this out --

Randy does the cowbell-playing and the Four-Tops dance moves, perfectly coordinated. Earl is just annoyed.

EARL

(croaking)

Randy. Nobody cares. I only gave you the cowbell to get you out of my way.

Randy whimpers.

Tears well in his eyes.

Everyone else looks at Earl like he did something really, really low.

EARL (V.O.)
And just then, I knew what Ronnie
VanZant meant when he sang, "Why am
I losin' one of my best friends?"
And I thought back on everything
that had gone wrong with Tapewölf.

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Happy Eddie plays a SCORCHING GUITAR SOLO.

Young Earl stops him.

YOUNG EARL
Stop it, Happy Eddie -- that'll
distract them from the singin'!

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S LIVING ROOM - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Earl sketches a drawing. Young Handsome Ron looks on.

YOUNG HANDSOME RON
That "Tapewölf" thing looks kinda
gross.

Young Earl snaps his pencil in two.

YOUNG EARL
Never question the Tapewölf!

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - DAY - FLASHBACK

Young Earl lectures the rest of the band.

YOUNG EARL
Maybe this band isn't big enough
for Earl Hickey! MAYBE NO BAND IS
BIG ENOUGH FOR EARL HICKEY!

CUT TO:

EXT. TRAILER PARK - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Young Earl sits alone in the trailer park, unhappy.

He holds a sheet of paper titled "TCSI Contest Application".

He burns it.

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Earl, in his now-inaudible voice, gives a heartfelt speech to the rest of the band.

EARL (V.O.)

And they had a common factor: *me*.
Deep down, I knew the other guys
were awesome, and that threatened
me, so I just wanted to be in
control.

The band tries to listen, but they can't hear anything.

EARL (V.O.)

Karma wasn't trying to make us
fail; karma was telling me the band
could make it on their own.

Earl finishes his (non-V.O.) speech to the band.

Earl exits.

The others look at each other.

MAD DOG MIKE

Does anybody have any idea what he
was sayin'?

The others AD LIB 'no' responses, except for:

RANDY

Pretty sure Earl said *you* should
sing, Happy Eddie.

HAPPY EDDIE

I only know the words to one song.

Everyone looks worried.

In the background, Earl drives by and HONKS.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT

Signage: "TCSI night 6! (wild-card entries)"

Smaller signage: "Next week: Motörhead night"

DARNELL (O.S.)
Next up, it's "Tapewölf"!

A THIN SMATTERING OF APPLAUSE.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT

Earl sits in the audience, sipping a beer.

Joy, Catalina, and the Skynyrd Expert sit in the judges' seats in front of the stage.

Mad Dog Mike, Handsome Ron, and Happy Eddie take the stage, looking worried and not-at-all confident.

BAR PATRONS mill around the crab shack.

Happy Eddie steps up to the mic.

HAPPY EDDIE
Hi.
(feedback)
Uh... we're Tapewölf.

The band plays a MUSICAL INTRO.

Earl winces.

HAPPY EDDIE
*If I leave here tomorrow,
Would you still remember me?*

Yup, the band has started playing "Free Bird".

CATALINA
Oh god. They're totally FBing!

JOY
Ten points off.

HAPPY EDDIE

*For I must be travelling on, now,
'cause there's too many places I've
got to see.*

Bar patrons roll their eyes.

A few hoot their derision.

Earl drinks, COUGHS a few times, and to his surprise MAKES
SOME NOISE.

Experimentally, he MAKES A COUPLE MORE NOISES.

HAPPY EDDIE

*But, if I stayed here with
you, girl,
Things just couldn't be the
same.*

EARL (V.O.)

And suddenly, karma saw fit
to give me my voice back. So
I did something that I'd
never done before.

Earl stands up, and shouts loud and clear:

EARL

You can do it, y'all! You got it,
Happy Eddie.

Earl claps a few times.

The BAND STOPS.

EARL (V.O.)

I told Happy Eddie that I believed
in him.

The bar patrons glare at Earl.

A few start approaching Earl, threateningly.

Happy Eddie clears his throat.

And the next line Happy Eddie sings sounds ABSOLUTELY
AMAZING.

HAPPY EDDIE

*'cause I'm as free as a bird now,
And this bird you can not change!*

The bar patrons stop in their tracks.

Joy's jaw drops.

Even Darnell, who never really 'got' Skynyrd before, wipes
away a tear.

Earl grins.

Happy Eddie strums a chord, and sings:

HAPPY EDDIE
Lord knows, I can't change!

Randy HITS THE COWBELL ONCE, and THE REST OF THE BAND COMES BACK IN, with Randy SINGING BACKGROUND VOCALS.

EARL (V.O.)
It got me to thinkin': different things bring out the worst in different people.

CUT TO:

INT. RON'S GARAGE - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

A continuation of the flashback we saw earlier, with Earl and Randy both dressed in black.

It's a bit later. A BRIGHT LIGHT shines on the disco ball, sending bits of sparkly light all over the garage.

Randy stares at the disco ball, transfixed.

Meanwhile, Earl's head is stuck in the waste bin. He struggles to free himself.

EARL (V.O.)
With Randy, it's the irresistible allure of shiny objects.

EARL
Randy! My head's stuck! There's rotted stuff in here!

RANDY
Not now. Randy needs some 'Randy time'.

CUT TO:

EXT. SMALL-TOWN STREET - DAY - FLASHBACK

Earl walks down the same street we saw earlier.

EARL (V.O.)
 Heck, half the things on my list
 wouldn't've happened if I'd taken a
 step back and saw how I was bein' a
 jerk.

For no reason whatsoever, Earl casually KICKS OVER A
 FLOWERPOT, stomps on the dirt a couple of times, grins, and
 keeps walking.

CUT TO:

EXT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

The rousing OUTRO OF "FREE BIRD" plays over LOUD AUDIENCE
 CHEERS.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT

Randy plays the cowbell like a man possessed (but with
 impeccable rhythm).

Handsome Ron is stock-still and very cool, like we saw in the
 first flashback.

Mad Dog Mike pounds the drums gleefully.

And slowly, Happy Eddie cracks a smile.

Amid the cheering bar patrons, Earl and Darnell look on in
 shock.

EARL
 Is Happy Eddie *smilin'*?

DARNELL
 Maybe he got somethin' stuck in his
 teeth.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT - FLASH-FORWARD

Happy Eddie, Handsome Ron, and Mad Dog Mike pose on stage
 with the Winner's Jacket. A bunch of fans (including Earl
 and Randy) cheer in the background. The old man stands
 opposite with a camera.

HANDSOME RON

Wait! Wait!

The band gathers Earl and Randy into the group.

The old man takes a POLAROID PHOTO of everybody (Earl, of course, has his eyes shut).

EARL (V.O.)

Turns out, they won the contest all by themselves! None of 'em wore the jacket, 'cos it smelt like dead possum, but they did get a monthly gig playin' at the strip club.

CUT TO:

EXT. CLUB CHUBBY'S - SIDE DOOR - NIGHT - FLASH-FORWARD

Mad Dog Mike drags out the same drunken patron we saw earlier.

DRUNKEN PATRON

Okay, Mad Dog Mike! I'll fight you this time!

MAD DOG MIKE

Okay, but I have to finish my set first.

Mad Dog Mike darts back inside. The drunken patron sits.

DRUNKEN PATRON

Allrighty.

CUT TO:

INT. CRAB SHACK - NIGHT - BACK TO PRESENT

Right where we left off -- the band builds to the big finish.

EARL (V.O.)

But it wasn't about fame or fortune.

The band plays the last chords. The audience goes wild(er).

EARL (V.O.)

What mattered was, on that night, we *all* felt like rock gods.

Earl gets out his list, crosses off "189: Ruined Tapewölf's chances at fame and fortune."

EARL (V.O.)

Like Ronnie VanZant once said,
*All that you need is in your soul,
And you can do this if you try.
All that I want for you my son
Is to be satisfied.*

Earl CLAPS and HOLLERS for his friends.

FADE OUT.