

Foreword

The arrival of 1964 found most of America in complete disarray; a state of shock, fear and melancholy having recently enveloped the country. This was particularly true of its youth. Lost adolescents struggled with everyday life, suddenly stripped of the innocence and the sense of security we had taken for granted our entire lives. We had lost our beloved President, and within that tragedy, our confidence and direction. It would take something incredible, even magical, to come along and snap us out of our dreary existence. And something actually did. On the night of February 9th, a single television event would electrify and forever unify a certain element of young America. The live performance of four young British musicians would be the inspiration for millions of teenage boys to pick up a guitar and begin their search for a drummer who had witnessed the same event and been affected in the same way.

The Beatles would be the catalyst for an epidemic of garage bands, which suddenly began sweeping the country. Garages and spare bedrooms in virtually every suburb of America were soon infested with teenage boys, for the expressed purpose of forming a band, each with the hopes and dreams of someday achieving local, regional, or perhaps even international fame and fortune. This was a dream of mine, as it was for many of the people I grew up with. Some were schoolmates, while others were close friends. One was my younger brother. But in Jacksonville, Florida, we were all brothers in one very significant way. While we all certainly looked forward to the opportunity to outperform each other on stage, we became a fraternity of sorts, a brotherhood of young musicians committed to helping each other to grow, to get better, and to eventually make it out of town.

Guitarists from rival bands getting together to learn from each other was commonplace. If a group had an important gig coming up, the first call you made was to a rival band, to borrow enough equipment to get the job done. This convention crossed all barriers without regard to age, social status, or your current station as a musician. Naturally, there were the veterans, those considered your betters, who in any other situation may not give you the time of day. Yet, you could walk right up to the same guy while he was trying out a new guitar at Marvin Kay's Musiccenter or Paulus Music, and say, "Hey man. Show me that riff?" The answer was always the same. "Sure, kid!"

We grew to depend upon each other, to set our goals by, and as a means by which to measure our own progress against that of the competition, which was each other. We all hoped to someday be as tight as 4 Plus 1, and to eventually have the polish and the stage presence of the fabulous Dalton Gang. This was pretty much the only shot we had. It was Jacksonville after all. Your other options were to work for the railroad or join the Navy. If your parents were loaded, perhaps you might someday go to Gainesville, in hopes of becoming an accountant, or another half-assed attorney. But, for this collection of young talent, the sky was the limit, and the way of life was rumored to be a hell of a lot more fun.

As we grew older, many fell by the wayside, while others continued to push forward. The reward seemed well worth the risk, despite the scorn and ridicule of those who had once pretended to wish us well.

Perhaps these are some of the reasons why so many bands emerged from this same small area, all during the same period of time. While some theorize that Lynyrd Skynyrd started it all, and

everyone else simply followed along, a few minutes alone with the music blows that theory all to hell. And while Skynyrd themselves were certainly influenced by Gregg and Duane Allman, one would be hard pressed to find a single one of their songs that bears any resemblance to anything ever produced by the Allman Brothers Band.

Another Jacksonville band that was a major inspiration for all of us at a time when many of us were just learning to play was the Classics IV. And who had inspired them, but guys like Johnny Tillotson, who in the early '60s had proven that it really didn't matter what you played, or where you came from, as long as the music was good. The point here being, that while we never paid much attention to the other guys' music, we never lost focus of the individuals responsible for it. They inspired us, not to be like them, but to be good – like them.

As a child, my parents, and one very special aunt, saw to it that my life was filled with music, from Eddy Arnold and Marty Robbins to Elvis Presley and James Brown. If I had to say who or what it was that first provided the allure, the real desire to perform, I would have to say it happened at age 10, when my aunt took me to see James Brown at the old Jacksonville Baseball Park. Though Elvis, the Everly Brothers, and Roy Orbison also come to mind, I have never seen an entertainer, before or since, who took such command of an audience.

I loved songs like “Jezebel” and “Cathy’s Clown,” because they were haunting, expressing an element of fear and emotion, while “I’ll Go Crazy” added a sense of rage, raw power, and urgency to this formula by which I was already captured. This formula would serve as my template for recognizing and appreciating the better songs of that time period.

Still, it was the Beatles who started the fire that would burn within me for the rest of my life, while local guitar heroes saw to it that the light never dimmed. Guys like Auburn Burrell, Jimmy Pittman, Jerry Zambito, and Duane Allman were but a few who were constant reminders that the dream may actually be attainable.

I suppose I always wanted to play in a band; to be a “rock star.” Maybe I just never had the work ethic that such an extraordinary goal required. Or maybe it was because I was so insistent on having my own way that I was unwilling to work through certain disparities with my bandmates. My own shortcomings notwithstanding, I was fortunate enough to have worked alongside many musicians who did put in the hard work, and did work through the many obstacles and distractions that stymied the careers of those of less conviction.

Over the years I have enjoyed books, interviews, documentaries and many conversations about the subject of “Southern Rock;”--the Allman Brothers Band, Lynyrd Skynyrd, and certain venues of the South. While I have always detested the term, largely because the majority of the bands classified as such were never rock bands to begin with, I've found most accounts to be fairly accurate depictions of what actually took place.

So too have I run across those that were not at all accurate, and in my opinion should never have been published. Then again, few of us see things from the same perspective.

Because much of my own account documents a period long before anyone had achieved any real success, it does not include gory details of trashed hotel rooms, internal fighting, drug overdoses and car wrecks, which too often accompany financial success. It does, however, provide an accurate and chronological depiction of what I was able to witness first hand between the years of 1964 and 1987.

While some of the content may contain references and scenarios which may be less interesting to those who have never worked in the rock music industry, I implore you to follow along as best you can, as this material is most relevant to the overall story.

It is my intent to provide more fact and clarity to stories you may have already heard, while establishing a complete understanding of things you may never have been aware of.

And while this writing should by no means be construed as a guide or recipe for attaining monumental success, it should be enjoyed as an inside look into a world where dedicated artists were doing exactly that. This is the story as I lived it, exactly as I recall.

An old friend once made a statement which rang very true:

“No one wants to live looking in the rear-view. But if you occasionally take a glance into yours, you have quite the view.”

The following is my tribute, and my “Thank You” to all those in the mirror.

Larry Steele – 2016

Part I

From the Top

My great, great grandfather, Henry William Steele, of Conecuh County Alabama, served the side of the Union during the Civil War. Angered by the commandeering of his oxen, wagons, a couple of cows and all the meat from his smokehouse by Confederate troops, he enlisted as a blacksmith in the Union Calvary at Tallahassee, at the tender age of forty-three. Talk about brother against brother-- Henry had seven of them to explain himself to.

One of my fondest recollections is of my cousin, Elton Wallace, strumming his guitar before an open fire in the middle of the woods surrounding Henry's old homestead. I sat on a log beside my dad as he and his brothers passed around a jar of shine which had miraculously appeared from beneath the log. Too young to determine how good he actually was, I could only assume by the number of requests Elton obliged that his repertoire was, at the very least, extensive. What really struck me, however, was the joy he seemed to have while playing, as did those of us who watched him perform. While I suppose it could have been the liquor that produced some of that elation, for me it was the guitar that left the memory indelible in my mind.

My early education included growing up before the television on Saturday mornings, where the good guys, Gene Autry and Roy Rogers, both played the guitar. Desiring to be just like them, I hoped someday to have a guitar of my own. On Christmas day, 1957, I was delivered a genuine Roy Rogers model, compliments of Santa himself. Though I never learned to tune the instrument, let alone play it, I would spend countless hours before my mother's dresser mirror, where I was able to magically become Elvis, Johnny Cash, or whomever else I wanted to be.

My parents had met in Atlanta, Georgia in 1949 and married in nearby Stockbridge a short time later. It was in Atlanta that I was born in 1952. About twenty years later I would return there, to witness first-hand the launch of the career of a band co-founded by one of my closest friends. In fact, I had believed at the time that I was a member of that band. But it was not to be.

A lot had happened within that 20 year period, and would continue to happen for years to come. And the whole story began in a tiny southwest section of the North Florida town that no one ever spoke of.

The family moved to Jacksonville in 1956, my dad having taken a job there with an electronics distributor after serving in the Air Force, while my mom was transferred there by Southern Bell. Had Daddy moved us to any other part of town, or even across the river, I would not have had this story to tell. Nor would I have lived the extraordinary life with which I've been blessed because of it.

With both parents working, the majority of our rearing was administered by a black woman, Sallie Mae Thomas, who would remain with our family for twenty six years, caring for and helping to mold two generations of Steele children during that time.

My mother came from Screven, Georgia, the youngest girl of seven children and the only one to bear children of her own, designating my siblings and myself the center of attention for some seventeen aunts and sixteen uncles. As a result, we were raised with many different influences and opinions, without which none of our lives would have been complete.

Upon our arrival in Jacksonville, the family rented a house at 4716 Palmer Street, in the Lake Shore area of the Westside, where my dad repaired radios and televisions at night as a second source of income in our small garage.

The house was at the edge of an alley, which ran behind a block long strip of various stores and businesses. It seemed no time at all before my Aunt Evelyn moved into the house directly across the street, while my Aunt Edith and her husband lived on San Juan Avenue at Stimson Street, one block over. Here they also provided a home for my recently widowed aunt, Annie.

The first friend I made was Carl Johnson, a kindly black gentleman who drove a white, Willys Jeep, delivering prescriptions for Easterling's Pharmacy. Carl wore a full blown khaki uniform, complete with a cap much like that of a policeman or a milk man. He dressed as though he expected a detailed inspection at any moment, with a starched shirt, creased pants and a polished visor. Carl was relatively tall, thin, and always wore a big smile. He took his job very seriously, was a devoted family man and a man of the Lord. He taught me things like honesty being the best policy and how important it was to appreciate all the things with which God blessed us. He considered his job just one example of the many ways in which he himself was blessed.

Eventually I was allowed to ride along on Carl's deliveries, during which time he might point out someone on a street corner with a sour look on his face. He'd say, "Reckon what that man's got on his mind?" Carl never could understand why everyone didn't carry the same, seemingly perpetual smile as himself. He'd say things like, "You know?...If a man stacked up all the good things that happen in a day against the bad, the bad things don't usually amount to a hill 'a beans.

You remember that, young Steele!"

Carl loved to sing gospel hymns while he worked, which was in stark contrast to the kind of music preferred by his co-worker, Calvin, who relieved Carl every afternoon at four o'clock.

Calvin was shorter and much stockier than Carl. He also wore the same Easterling's uniform, though not quite the same way as did Carl. Calvin wore a cabbie's cap, a lid, as we refer to them these days. He wore black loafers, always shined to perfection, with taps on the heels. He had a swagger to his walk, always had a big fat stogie in one corner of his mouth and he grinned rather than smiled. Though Calvin wasn't as approachable in the beginning as Carl, we too eventually became friends.

Calvin carried a transistor radio at all times, which he kept tuned to the local R&B station. He loved his music, his cigars, and his car; a 1951 Chevy, with a Packard "Silver Swan" hood ornament. He also sported chrome skirts, baby moons and a large pair of dice, which hung from the rear-view mirror. Calvin was the epitome of cool, and as soon as I was old enough to get away with it, I too would wear taps on my shoes and listen to the same R&B station, WOBS.

What the Hell?

At the insistence of my Aunt Evelyn, I was enrolled in kindergarten in 1956 at the age of four, much to my surprise and dismay. Miss Bagley's School was housed in a huge Victorian style house near the corner of Stockton and Oak Streets, in the Riverside area, and specialized in such subjects as dance and etiquette. Having no idea what the value of either of these things were, I had little interest and showed even less enthusiasm. We called our teacher 'Auntie Sister'. To this day I do not know the lady's real name. Nevertheless, I remember her as a very sweet person who told interesting stories, and wore weird, yellow-tinted glasses that I would later associate with Roy Orbison. It was under her tutelage that I first learned that life could have its rough spots, as her curriculum was obviously geared strongly toward the girls.

We hardly ever went outdoors, and when we did we had to hold hands, walking along the St. Johns while Miss Bagley and Auntie Sister went on and on about how beautiful the sky and the river were. But this was Jacksonville, where blue skies and water were pretty much the order of the day. We don't want to hold hands! We want to *play!*

It was here, however, where I would meet people who would play key roles in my later life, and with whom I remain friends to this day. One was Ricky Mathews, who is most responsible for my getting into music. Another, Mary Lee Johnson, later became my wife of 13 years, and is the mother of my three beautiful children, who have since blessed me with ten equally beautiful grandchildren.

In 1957 my education would continue back in my neighborhood, at Lake Shore Kindergarten, on Colonial Avenue. I would miss my new friend, Rick, though the separation would turn out to be temporary. There was little else I would miss about Miss Bagley's school.

Lake Shore Kindergarten offered the kind of program where a boy could start the day with the Pledge of Allegiance, eat some paste, then go outside to play. After an hour or two we'd go back inside for lunch, usually consisting of Welch's grape juice, Ritz crackers with peanut butter, and a bologna or banana sandwich.

Our teacher, Mrs. Scott, was a sweet, grandmotherly type with horn rimmed glasses and a perky, high pitched voice. Her manner and tone were such that we were confident of every day being a good one. At the end of each day she would load her station wagon full of children and drive us home so safely that we didn't even need seatbelts. Good thing, as cars didn't have them.

Here, the children were seated four to a four-foot- by-four-foot table. The boy who sat across from me always seemed to be mad at the world, never smiled, and never had anything to say to anyone. As shy as I was at the time, I was reluctant to attempt to engage him in any conversation. But there was something about him that was both intriguing and perplexing.

Allen wore black, high top sneakers, which indicated to me that his family was probably poor.

Somewhere along the line I had come by the notion that rich kids wore white sneakers, while poor kids wore black. Where I got that is beyond me, but this boy's situation really had me confused.

While his shoes were black, they were actually PF Flyers, which did not come cheap, as these were the shoes that enabled you to run faster and jump higher than anyone. Everybody knew that. But how could a poor kid have PF Flyers? After contemplating this for several days, I was finally able to summon up the courage to ask.

“Hey. You got PF Flyers.”

The sleepy eyed kid with slumped shoulders looked up.

“Yeah... So?”

“Well ... Can you really run faster and jump higher than anybody else?”

“Yep.”

That was as far as my initial conversation with Allen Collins got. It would not pick up again until days later, when he caught me admiring one of the little girls in our class. Her name was Mary Ann, and I couldn't seem to look away from her big brown eyes.

“She's pretty, ain't she?” Allen giggled, breaking my spell with his devilish grin. I first wanted to deny staring at the girl, but it was apparent that Allen liked her too. We already had something in common. We were probably the only two kids in kindergarten who were already checking out the little girls. Little did I know at the time that over the next thirty-three years we would share so many other common interests.

In September, 1958, I attended big boy school for the first time at Bayview Elementary. I recall that the floor in the classroom was tile, shiny and slick, not unlike the hallway I had traveled for what seemed a lifetime, in search of my class. Small desks were placed in groups of six, one group in each corner of the room. Spotting my name right away, taped to a desk before me, I took my seat in the corresponding chair, so as to avoid any attention from anyone. Still the shy little tyke I was at age five, I dared not look anyone in the eye, but rather scanned the general layout of the room where I would be imprisoned for the next nine months.

A long row of windows ran the length of the back wall, allowing the sun to shine in, creating a prism effect which rippled across the freshly polished floor. Just outside were the biggest swing sets I had ever seen, complete with seesaws, monkey bars and the works. On the top shelf of a bookcase, in one corner of the room, was a beautiful birthday cake, with white icing that shined like glass and was rumored to never grow stale.

I recognized the teacher, Miss Rosalie Powell, as a lady I had seen in my Aunt Evelyn's beauty shop on more than one occasion. It suddenly occurred to me that this was exactly how I had been railroaded into my first kindergarten, at Miss Bagley's. Quickly turning away to avoid eye contact, I scanned the classroom floor, just below desk level, now checking out the shoes that everyone was wearing. Most of the girls wore black patent leather, like at Sunday school. Some of the boys wore lace-ups, a few wore penny loafers and the rest wore tennis shoes. But it was one pair of black, high top, PF Flyers that grasped my attention. My heart raced as my eyes darted from the shoes to the face, which, much to my relief, belonged to my old pal, Allen.

Unlike the other students, Allen had pulled his chair out from beneath his desk, where he slouched as low as he could possibly get to the floor, his skinny legs dangling like cooked spaghetti out into the aisle. He had a look on his face as though someone had shot his dog, and as the bell rang out, signaling the start of our first day of school, it was apparent that Allen was not at all pleased with the program.

There didn't seem to be an awful lot to learn in first grade, as I had already learned most of the reading and writing stuff in kindergarten and at home. I could count and print pretty well, and spelling was something my mom had quizzed me on since I learned to talk. The best I could make of it,

first grade was more about learning manners, protocols and procedures, and how to make it easier for grownups to tolerate us. Things like keeping your mouth shut and raising your hand, waiting to be called upon in the event you did have something to say all seemed to be at the top of the list. Asking permission to go to the bathroom, waiting in line, and taking a nap after lunch were apparently more of the fundamentals of improving oneself.

Looking back, it is my belief that the first step in this program should have been teaching us how to accept and embrace the changes and new ideas, else you were bound to encounter a student or two along the way who might resist, perhaps even rebel against such behavioral modifications. Someone like Allen Collins, for instance. Simply put, Allen wasn't ready for school, nor was the school system ready for him. The first words I ever heard Allen say, pertaining to school were, "I hate this shit! I hate this shit!" While I understood the hate part perfectly, I wasn't real sure at the time what "shit" was. It occurred to me that this was precisely the reason for teachers wanting us to keep our mouths shut.

With every opportunity Allen was hell bent on proving to Miss Powell and everyone else that he didn't belong in school. Sitting up straight, raising your hand, nap after lunch? He was having none of it.

Over time I would learn some of the reasons for his attitude. For one, he didn't like to talk at all about his parents or his life at home, only that he had an older sister, Betty, who, according to Allen, picked on him all the time. He felt that his family didn't really like him, and that school was their way of getting rid of him. Besides that, he was planning to be either a jet pilot or a race car driver when he grew up, and could not understand how any of the stuff he was supposed to learn in school was going to help him fly higher or drive any faster.

This seemed a legitimate argument to me, as did the question as to why we had to sit perfectly straight in contoured chairs. It was as if they intended to teach us the joy of being uncomfortable, but unlike Allen, I had never considered spitting in the teacher's face for attempting to correct my posture.

Despite our obvious differences, we were buddies, probably because we were all each other had at that point in our lives. Over the years our friendship would endure many tough and tragic times, along with many, many good ones.

During our first year at Bayview I discovered there were several other kids I had known from kindergarten, and from around the neighborhood. Along with Ricky Mathews, Julie Williams was the first friend I ever had who was a girl. Having Julie and Allen in the same class was sort of like the old Andy Panda cartoon, where the angel sits on one shoulder and the devil sits on the other. Of course, Julie was the angel.

Entering second grade, I was very disappointed to learn that neither were in my class, though Allen and I still got to see each other at recess, in the cafeteria, and when we punched each other as we passed in the hall.

As I recall, it was also during second grade when they began teaching us the "Duck and Cover" drills.

In the event of an atomic blast, the threat of which loomed daily in 1959, there would be no time to evacuate, hence "Duck and Cover" was the prescribed method of survival. Made sense to me. I was right with the program. As soon as that alarm sounded, I was ducking and covering my ass off, making damn sure I would be one those to survive. But Allen wasn't buying any of that either.

One day the alarm sounded two shorts blasts, indicating a fire drill. We all immediately stood up and formed a line. At the teacher's direction we marched single file out into the hallway, then through the nearest exit, to the safety of the schoolyard. Here we were to stand quietly until we were given the all clear, to march back into the building.

As we stood there waiting some of us were whispering back and forth, sort of celebrating the fact that it was only a fire drill, rather than the dreaded "Duck and Cover," which could be pretty terrifying. Since the school was within a mile or two of the Naval Air Station, there was always the sound of jets flying overhead. One couldn't help wonder from time to time who exactly those jets belonged to. A fire, on the other hand, was something we could actually see, or smell, and quickly determine the best route to make good our escape. But bombs? Nobody wanted any part of those.

All of a sudden I could hear Allen, hollering from the next line over. "That 'Duck 'n Cover's a bunch of bullshit anyway! Don't y'all know what an atomic bomb is? That's radiation! That stuff sneaks up on you and fries your guts from the inside out! All that duckin' and coverin' is gonna do is keep you from getting cut up when the glass starts flyin'. Who cares about a little glass when you're all burnt up like a chicken? Hey! We're all gonna be fried chicken, y'all!"

It was my teacher, Miss Daly, who tried to get there fast enough to shut him up, but the damage was done. Everybody within range of Allen's voice was now in a complete state of panic. Girls were screaming and crying, and the boys were trying really hard not to piss on themselves.

"Miss Daly, Is that true?!" "I want my mama!" "Oh God! They're gonna kill us all!" "I wanna go home!!"

About that time Allen's teacher, I believe it was Miss Prom, grabbed him by the arm and jerked him out of the line. As he was being dragged off to the principal's office he looked back with that shit-eating grin that only Allen could deliver. Now he was having fun.

Name that Tune

As a young boy, I developed a great love for travel, made possible by my dad's friendships with several Greyhound bus drivers. At the age of six, I began "touring," spending my summers in rural areas of Georgia and the Florida Panhandle, having been safely delivered by one of these trusted family friends. There, I would learn many valuable lessons, and of a lifestyle far removed from city life. I experienced many wonderful adventures with aunts, uncles and cousins on both sides of the family, and while some of their homes were very different from my own, the standards were the same, with few exceptions. You did not lie, you did not steal, you did not pick on those weaker than yourself, and you did not miss church. Any violation of any of these simple rules would get your ass whipped promptly, by whichever aunt or uncle was available at the time to administer said punishment. Assured that the same, or worse, would reoccur upon the return home, I found it much to my advantage to comply with each of the regulations set forth.

In Richmond Hill, Georgia, one of my favorite playgrounds was the old Henry Ford plantation, on the Ogeechee River, where my cousin Keith and I would fish on summer afternoons and explore the old buildings and tunnels, which ran beneath the grounds of the great mansion. My grandfather had been a security guard for Mr. Ford during the 1930s, and it was now my Uncle Carlos' duty, as chief deputy sheriff of Bryan County, to protect the property from vandals and the like since Mr. Ford's death in 1947.

According to family legend, on one occasion my grandfather ran Mr. Ford and his personal assistant off of his own property at gunpoint, having no idea who he was, and Mr. Ford being without identification at the time. The Ford contingency returned shortly thereafter with the sheriff, who made the proper introductions.

The story goes that my grandfather worried for weeks about the likelihood of being without a job as a result of the misunderstanding. When Christmas rolled around that year, he was summoned to the railroad depot by some of Ford's men. There, he was presented with a huge wooden crate. Inside the large container was a brand new Model A, with a note:

"Merry Christmas, Benjamin. Thank you for taking good care of my home. – H. Ford"

Over the years I learned to bridle, saddle and ride a horse. I also learned to fight, swim, ride a bicycle, shoot a rifle, ride a motorcycle, drive a three-on-the-tree, and how to conduct myself in a hayloft with a fast girl, all in Richmond Hill. It was here also that I became more familiar with musical instruments.

Cousin Keith had an upright piano which he took lessons on and tried with all he had to teach me to play, but without much success. I was relegated to playing monotonous bass parts on the lower keys while Keith composed little melodies from the other end of the bench, much to the delight of his mother. "Bobcat Boogie" was probably the first composition that I recall being involved with. But I was more interested in Keith's box guitar. I knew no chords, or even what notes the individual strings represented. Still, with a guitar in my hands, I was most content to figure out the melodies of our favorite songs of the time. One of my favorites was the hauntingly cool "Jezebel," which I picked up from an old Frankie Laine record that was played repeatedly by the next door neighbors.

Perhaps my biggest thrill in Richmond Hill was riding with Uncle Carlos in his patrol car, and hearing the sudden crackle of his police radio, followed by a female voice: "542?... 542?" Without being told, Keith and I knew to jump in the back floorboard and hang on. A moment later we would be flying down U.S. 17 at 100 miles per hour, or down some backwoods pulpwood trail at 45, trying as hard as we could not to giggle with excitement as we imagined what kind of situation awaited when the car finally came to a halt. Through the back windshield we could see the whip antenna of the Plymouth Fury laying almost parallel to the trunk lid, a clear confirmation that we were hauling serious ass. Off to get the bad guys!

As heroes go, my Uncle Carlos ranked right up there with Lucas McCain and Fireball Roberts.

"Mister Dynamite"

Anna Belle Harris-Kennedy-Jones was my mother's oldest sister. At age 16 she left their rural Georgia home immediately after high school graduation to take a job with Southern Bell Telephone & Telegraph in Jacksonville. It was 1927. From here she would send money and "care packages" back home each week to help feed and clothe her six younger siblings. Over her lifetime she would support all of our family members in many different ways, and it was she who initially encouraged me to pursue the two major loves of my life, music and travel.

As a young boy most of my Friday nights were spent with my aunt, playing records and watching *M Squad* as we prepared for an early start to Saturday's activities, be it going to the beach with her girlfriends, or riding the bus downtown, to spend the day shopping. While the beach was always fun, I preferred going downtown, just she and I, where, instead of hysterical laughter, we were surrounded by tall buildings, store windows, and the wind blowing hard against our faces as we turned each mysterious corner. Watching traffic cops standing in the middle of busy intersections, blowing whistles, to direct shoppers where and when they could cross the street, was much more exciting to a young boy than being stuck in the middle of a car full of mouthy, beer drinking women in wet bathing suits.

These Saturday adventures were never complete without first stopping by the Record Bar, or Abe Livert's Records, on Adams Street, which was also where we caught the bus back to the Westside. Here, Annie would sort through the 45s, by artists like Fats Domino, The Diamonds, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Marty Robbins, and, of course, Elvis. On this one particular Saturday though, she was looking for a record that she was especially excited about, called "I'll Go Crazy" by some guy she had never mentioned before, James Brown. From here things started getting a little crazy.

One summer evening, about 1960, Aunt Annie announced that she had a very special Saturday night planned for the two of us. After getting dressed up and taking a fairly short cab ride from 54th and Pearl, where she shared a home with her new husband, a Jacksonville police detective, we arrived at Jacksonville Ballpark for what would be my first live concert.

Unable to see through the throngs of much taller, not to mention noisier people than myself, I was stunned at the sight of the large stage that suddenly came into view, not ten yards from where we were eventually seated. The stage was filled with drum sets, amplifiers and what looked like a giant Erector set, hovering over the top, loaded with hundreds of brilliant lights of different colors. At eight years old I was naturally inquisitive as to the purpose of each piece of equipment on the stage.

Between the heat of the crowd and the electricity in the air, I felt as though I was glowing, shining like a new silver dollar, as I looked up at all the bobbing heads and faces above me. I considered for a moment how special my aunt must be, for us to be the only whites to be invited to such an amazing event.

When the house lights came up after the opening act, the atmosphere resembled that of a fair, or a used car lot at night. Aunt Annie, grabbing my hand, kneeled down and whispered.

“Son? Do you realize we’re the only ones here who aren’t colored?”

“Yeah! I know!” I said. “How’d you do that?”

“Well, you just never mind about that. Are you having a good time?” she asked.

“Yes ma’am! ...You mean it’s not over?”

“Oh no!” She laughed. “That wasn’t who we came to see! We came to see James Brown!”

Now I was confused. I had heard very clearly what she said, yet my little mind was a bit slow to comprehend the enormity of it all. She said James Brown! But surely she couldn’t mean the same James Brown that sang on all those new records she had. This was the kind of celebrity you only saw on TV, from New York City or Hollywood. No way was he about to magically appear, singing and dancing right here, in Jacksonville, Florida.

What seemed just a few minutes later, the lights went out and people began to scream again, now louder than ever. The multicolored lights over the stage suddenly came back up. Everything on the stage now shined an emerald green as a second band began to play. This one had a lot more musicians than the first, with two drummers, and was even louder than the band before. Now everybody was again standing in their seats, including me and Aunt Annie.

A short little man came walking out onto the stage, at which time the band suddenly stopped. But this wasn’t him. This wasn’t James Brown. At first I thought maybe the little man was going to sing some James Brown songs, but he began talking instead. I couldn’t make out much of what he was saying into the microphone, but each time he said a couple of words people would cheer as the whole band hit a single deafening note on their instruments. The part that I was able to make out was when the little man yelled “...Now here he is... Mister Dynamite ...Mister Please, Please himself, the star of the show, *Mister James Brown!*”

All hell broke out as the band kicked off a song I was very familiar with. There he was, strutting out onto the stage, Mister Dynamite himself. People were screaming and clapping and stomping in their metal chairs. When the band suddenly stopped again, James grabbed the mic at center stage. “If you leave me, I’ll go crazy....”

Now every soul in the old ball park, including me, was doing exactly that – going crazy!

I won’t pretend to recall the entire concert, except that this was the single most powerful event I had ever been a part of. My excitement couldn’t be contained. My knees were weakened to the point that I felt I would surely fall from the chair I was jumping up and down in, which was pretty scary, as nobody, including my aunt, would have even noticed.

Under the lights, James appeared at times to float, almost magically, from one part of the stage to another, as intermittent lightning flashed overhead. As the band played on, the entire structure shook, as if the whole building would come crumbling down at any moment. The low notes came like thunder.

“What is that?” I screamed to my aunt. “That’s the bass, baby!” she screamed back, pointing out the responsible party on the stage. I was blown away.

At the end of the set they began another song I had heard many times over the last several weekends, “Please, Please, Please,” to the obvious delight of everyone in attendance. While it seemed the song would never end, it was so powerful that I hoped it never would.

At the end of the song James was down on his knees, screaming into the microphone, pleading with his baby, in obvious pain, “Baby, Please, Please, Please!” as the background singers repeated, “Baby, please don’t go-oh.”

The little guy who started the show off eventually entered again from the side of the stage, carrying with him a gold cape, which he carefully placed over James’ shoulders. The man then helped the star to his feet and began slowly leading him off the stage. I remember thinking, “That poor, poor man... He’s so broken, so hurt, he can’t even walk on his own.”

But, just as James reached the edge of the stage, he suddenly broke free of the cape and the man. Running back out, sliding on both knees to the center of the stage, he again grabbed the microphone in his hands. “Baby, *Please, Please, Please!!*” , as the bass and drums came crashing down, like thunder. The passion, energy, and emotion of that performance would remain clear in my mind and soul from that night forward.

It would be another six or seven years later, while watching the Syndicate of Sound at the Jacksonville Civic Auditorium, that I would realize what had made James Brown appear to float across the stage that night. This had actually been the first time I had seen a strobe light.

The ‘60s

For Christmas, 1960, I got two Channel Master transistor radios--a small, 6 transistor “pocket radio” from Santa, and a table model for bedroom listening, from my dad. My third grade teacher, Mrs. Cobb, allowed me to bring the pocket radio to school, so long as I surrendered it to her each morning. She would keep it in her desk drawer until class was dismissed, at which time she returned it to me for the walk home. I couldn’t wait to tune into “The Big Ape,” “The Mighty 690 in Jacksonville.” My favorite program was “Dan’s Dusty Discs,” an oldies program, featuring Dan Brennan. I was eight years old and already had a preference for the older stuff.

By now I was pretty much addicted to music. R&B artists like the Coasters, the Drifters, the Four Tops and Sam Cooke flooded the airwaves with hit after hit, along with the rockabilly stuff of the Everly Brothers, Roy Orbison, Marty Robbins and Jimmy Dean. While I loved everything Elvis did, the songs like “Cathy’s Clown,” Paul Anka’s “Lonely Boy,” and Orbison’s “Crying,” were the ones I just couldn’t get enough of. It seemed nothing but music could truly affect me emotionally in those days, revealing an intense love and respect for any song with that kind of power.

Country music had the same effect, and there were several local country stars that I loved to watch on television with my dad, including Jimmy Strickland, Glen Reeves and a singer named Wendell Griffin. In fact, Jimmy Strickland’s pedal steel player, Bill Echolls, worked for my dad at one time, and owned the first “black face” Fender amp I ever saw.

When the instrumentals came along, “Apache” was our official introduction to electric guitars and amplification, an affliction Rick Mathews and I were immediately stricken with. Next, we discovered

the Beach Boys, and by the end of 1962 they were the shit. As students at Bayview Elementary, we didn't know a lot about surfing, or girls either, but sixth graders knew plenty about badass cars. We glued them together all the time. Of course, I would be an Elvis fan for life, but the Beach Boys were so damned electric. It was rock and roll with Fender guitars through Fender amps. The sound was "steely," and very, very cool.

Rick and I, along with our buddy, Windy Salter, ran straight to Rick's house after school on most afternoons, to sing along with *Surfin' Safari*. All we needed now were some guitars. What we got instead were the "Missiles of October," a.k.a. the Cuban Missile Crisis, which would put a hold on our music and everything else.

It seemed the bombs would surely fall now; not a good time to make a pitch for a guitar.

At the end of 1962 there came two more instrumentals that had a profound effect on me and, apparently, a lot of other people. "The Lonely Bull," by Herb Alpert & the Tijuana Brass, and "Telstar," by the Tornados were both getting heavy airplay, and I was one kid who could not get enough of either. In fact, "The Lonely Bull" was the first recording my dad and I could enjoy listening to together since "Mack the Knife."

By 1963 the Beach Boys were making the charts with just about everything they released. When I got their *Surfer Girl* LP for my eleventh birthday, the song "In My Room" was one I wore the grooves out on. It was about me, as I suppose it seemed to be for every other kid in America. But, of course, there was a lot of other good music during this time.

On Wednesday nights my dad always took the family out to eat, at a place called Brownie's Drive In, where he would walk straight to the jukebox and play "Hello Walls," by Faron Young. It was country blues, and I loved it. There was other cool stuff on that juke box, from Johnny Cash, Bobby Bare and Lonnie Mack, as well as "Rhythm of the Rain," by the Cascades.

But by now the battle lines were being drawn. The local radio stations all wanted to know: "Are you an Elvis fan, or a Beach Boys fan?" Though I voted for Elvis on the Big Ape's phone-in survey, and never missed his movies, it was actually my Beach Boys album that now played non-stop in my bedroom.

Black Friday

Like most sixth-graders, Friday had always been my favorite day of the week. But that would all change on November 22, 1963, when the day turned into the longest, darkest, and most terrifying time I had ever lived. The plan that morning had been to go to school, knock out my assignments and return home at about three-thirty, to begin another warm November weekend. The following week would bring four days off, to celebrate Thanksgiving, while two weeks later would begin Christmas vacation. The remainder of the calendar year was all downhill from here, and life couldn't have been better. What no one could have known that morning was that all hell would break loose before the day was over.

We had just returned from lunch, to Mrs. Claremont's classroom, where the students were just beginning to settle down. Our teacher was handing out copies of the Weekly Reader, which was our regular reading material for Friday afternoons.

The messenger buzzer suddenly sounded, prompting designated class messenger, Darby Adams, to report to the main office. There, she would retrieve a message to be delivered right back to the teacher. But we knew right away that this wasn't one of your typical, "Timmy Brooks, your mother is here to get you for your doctor's appointment" type messages. No, this time you could hear every classroom door on the wing open and close, meaning all the messengers had been summoned at the same time.

As I sat in my desk, wondering what the message might be, I glanced inside my Weekly Reader to see if there were any pictures of President Kennedy. There had been photos for the last few weeks, documenting the President's travels throughout Europe and Ireland. I had made the comment in class, just a week or two earlier, that the President must be a very brave man, "to stand up and speak in front of all those Germans," as depicted in one of the earlier photos. Mrs. Claremont had responded, "Larry, I am ashamed to say that the President is probably much safer there than he is here, in his own country."

The statement had given me chills, and caused me to reflect upon when we had held our own little election at school. This had started all kinds of arguments, and even fights among the students, who were merely parroting what they had heard about the candidates at their own dinner tables. Even my own uncle didn't want Kennedy in the Whitehouse. "He'll hand everything over to the blacks!" he warned.

Just then I heard a teacher's voice echo from the south end of the hall. "Oh my God! *No!!!*" I looked up to see Darby standing at the teacher's desk, clutching a small slip of paper. Mrs. Claremont snatched the message from her hand as she made her way out into the hall, to see what the commotion was about. Darby stood there for a moment, eyes wide open, and her face pale, as if she had just seen something horrific. She finally began walking slowly down the aisle, back to her desk, which was directly behind my own. As she walked by she whispered, "Somebody shot President Kennedy."

A second message would soon follow, announcing that all the patrol boys were to prepare to go to their posts, as school would be closing early for the day. We were all gathered around the raincoat rack, discussing the events now taking place, when one of the guys said, "Kennedy should have never

been President anyway! I hope he dies!" I wanted to punch him in the face, but fear and good sense got the better of me. The fear was that I could have my badge taken away, while the common sense reminded me that he was about six inches taller and 20 pounds heavier than I was. I think I was mad enough that I could have taken him, but it would've taken too long to get him down. Instead of swinging away, I said, "He did, asshole! He's dead!" The effect was as if I had punched him in the face. This was the same effect the news would have on pretty much everyone for the next few months.

This was the day when all the rules changed. Or was it the day that we learned there were no rules? For me, the whole world seemed to lose its color. Nothing would ever be the same again. There was no longer that sense of security we had all become so accustomed to. Even our parents would become frightened, lost in a deep state of paranoia. How the hell could something like this happen?

Sleeping was no longer routine, and it seemed the days would never return to any state of normalcy. All the TV channels, which totaled two in the Jacksonville area at the time, showed nothing but the same clips--Dallas, the motorcade, the motorcycle cop ditching his bike and running up the grassy knoll, and interview after interview with the same bewildered witnesses.

Instead of *Paladin*, or the Cartwrights, the face of Lee Harvey Oswald was everywhere. This weasel of a man, this slime ball had in a matter of seconds taken the most important man in the free world completely out of the picture. Every time I shut my eyes I saw his face, then the face of the President, then Oswald again. The whole thing terrified me, probably because it was so obvious that the rest of the country was living the same nightmare. No one laughed, or even smiled anymore. Christmas was coming, but no one cared. People walked around with blank expressions, as if they were no longer living.

After a few days much of the adult population seemed to still be of the opinion that this was all the work of the Communists, and that Russia could attack at any moment. Oswald, after all, had "Communist ties," and had even lived in Russia at one time. Later we would hear suggestions of possible Mafia involvement, and of a "conspiracy," which included more than one shooter, as no single shooter could have possibly gotten off the shots in such rapid succession. "Bobby and Jack had really been giving those guys the business!" was a popular comment heard in the barber shops and elsewhere, in reference to the Mafia angle.

In the following weeks the atmosphere remained one of doom and gloom. It seemed the sun would never shine again, and even if it did, no one would notice. Even with the conclusion of the President's funeral and the coverage of Oswald's, the TV networks continued to run the same footage and interviews.

Once regular programming finally did resume, I kept expecting another "Special Report," announcing yet another tragedy, murder, or assassination. It was now so fresh and clear in our minds that no one was safe, and nothing was out of the realm of possibility.

Christmas wouldn't be much different than any of the other dark days since November 22nd. Everyone seemed to go through the motions. Lights were hung, trees were trimmed and wreaths were placed. Still, nobody seemed to have a smile for anyone.

The one good thing I remember happening was that I received my first real guitar for Christmas, a blonde, Stella, along with three picks and an instruction book, *The Mel Bay Guitar Method – Volume 1*. This was the one gift I really wanted, and needed.

Four days later one of Jacksonville's two luxury hotels, the Roosevelt, caught fire, killing 22 people, including the assistant fire chief, who died on the scene. It was the morning after the annual Gator Bowl game, between Air Force and North Carolina, which I had attended. What could possibly happen next?

What the country needed at this time, particularly its young people, was something to bring us out of this state of darkness we seemed to be living in. We needed something big. Something big enough to really shake things up. Something to believe in. The last thing I could have dreamed was that such a thing was actually possible.

The Invasion

The first indication I had that something was happening was shortly after we returned to school from Christmas vacation. There was a student named Phyllis in Miss Howard's class who never had anyone to talk to. In fact, everyone seemed to go out of their way to avoid this particular outcast, as she did not seem to be in line with what most of us considered normal. The girl would see two dogs locked up with each other on the playground and run screaming out of the classroom to interrupt their encounter, shaking her finger and lecturing them about what "naughty doggies" they were being. Of course, the dogs would pay her no mind, continuing on with what they were doing, which made for great comedy for those of us watching from the classrooms on the east side of the building.

But on this day she was surrounded by girls rather than dogs. Girls who previously would not have been caught dead in her presence were suddenly lining up to have a word or two with her. Later in the day I passed Phyllis in the hall and, without the mob surrounding her, was able to see what the sudden attention might be attributed to. It was the white sweatshirt she was wearing, the front of which depicted four weird looking young men with what appeared to be their autographs beneath each of their likenesses. Across the top it read, "The Beatles."

It was obvious that this had to be the name of some new vocal group, but having never heard of them, or their stupid name, I gave it little thought. Over the next several weeks more and more of the Beatle sweatshirts began to appear in various styles and artwork. Parents suddenly began talking about these "longhairs" they had seen on the Jack Paar show. One of them was my dad, who had not been very impressed. But within a month Beatle paraphernalia was everywhere you turned. There were Beatle lunchboxes, tee shirts, sweatshirts, magazines, dolls, bobble heads, book covers, plastic guitars and countless other items. The whole "Beatle" thing had gotten crazy.

One very cold Friday morning the classes all attended a special concert in the school auditorium. During the introduction one of the teachers had gotten a little carried away, introducing the band as "The Beatles." Because there were only three of them on stage, and none were left handed, it was obvious to the older students that this was not the case.

The band began their performance with one of the obligatory hits, which I'm pretty sure was "I Saw Her Standing There." Though I was already sick of hearing the song on the radio, I recall being very impressed with how they sounded. It was when they played a song I had never heard before, "All My Loving," that the whole thing started getting to me.

The musicians were guitarist/vocalist Lester Langdale, guitarist/vocalist Gary Tubbs, and drummer Ted Vaughn. I would later learn that the name of their band was the Yo-Yos, which they would later change to The Deep Six. Along with Maurice "Mouse" Samples, they would eventually become key contributors to the Jacksonville music scene.

The Beatles landed in America the following Friday. I attended a party that night, where all the conversation was Beatle this and Beatle that. I tried to avoid the conversations, as I knew nothing about them except that I really didn't care for them.

It was at this party that I was eventually forced to listen to the entire *Meet the Beatles* album. I had heard "She Loves You" and "I Want to Hold Your Hand" until I could have thrown up. The whole

“Yeah, yeah, yeah” thing just seemed stupid to me. Maybe I had just heard it too many times. Still I could not understand what all the fuss was about.

It was when I heard the song, “It Won’t Be Long” that everything changed. This was the turning point. Two minutes later, there was that song again, “All My Loving.” By the time the song was finished I was screaming right along with the girls, “Turn it over! Turn it over!”

February 9, 1964

When Sunday night rolled around I was parked directly in front of the TV, which must have seemed a bit unusual to my parents. “Don’t tell me you’re going to watch *Ed Sullivan* with us.” my mom quipped. “It’s those damn Beatles,” Daddy explained. “Every kid in the country will probably be watching Ed tonight.”

As I reflect upon this experience I have such deep appreciation for memories, as this is where is stored the single most life changing event of my childhood, and with few exceptions, my entire life. Without any need or desire for drink, popcorn, or candy, my little butt was planted firmly against the living room floor, in anticipation of what everyone at school defined as the greatest thing since Elvis.

This was a group I knew little about, except that they had at least two pretty cool songs. A band that, according to the rest of the world, was “the greatest singing group ever,” supposedly better than the Beach Boys and even better than Elvis. My dad had just walked over to turn up the volume when I heard Ed’s unmistakable voice, “Ladies and gentlemenThe Beatles!!”

As Paul counted off the first song, the sight and sound of screaming girls immediately corroborated the fact that I was witnessing something extremely special. By the time it registered that they had actually begun with “All My Loving,” I felt myself falling into some deep, mystical trance that I have, to this day, not fully recovered from. That was it. In little more than twenty seconds, I was completely captivated by what would come to be known as “Beatlemania.” From this point forward, there was nothing else in the world but me, the Beatles, and the sound coming out of that television set.

After the song I turned to my parents, who were sitting on the sofa behind me. I suppose I was looking for some sort of confirmation that they too had witnessed this unbelievably magical performance. My mom looked very puzzled by the whole thing, while my dad just continued shaking his head. “I don’t get it.” Daddy finally said.

“What?” I questioned. “You don’t think that’s the coolest song you ever heard?”

“I couldn’t tell ya,” he answered. “I couldn’t hear it for all that damn screaming.”

I knew it would take some time for the parents to come around, if they ever did. My mom still believed that Eddy Arnold and Johnny Cash were the best entertainers to ever draw a breath, while my dad was on this Herb Alpert thing that wouldn’t go away. For me, life had just begun.

As I tried to get to sleep that night, the rhythm still pounding in my head, I realized I had just witnessed something I would never forget; something that would have an everlasting effect on my life. What I didn’t realize at the time was that it would have the same effect on virtually every kid in America who ever dreamed of playing a guitar. Suddenly the world was looking pretty damn good again. It was the first time in eleven weeks I wasn’t thinking of our fallen leader.

The next Friday night my dad came in to give us our allowances. He pulled something from behind his back, which was the *Introducing... The Beatles* LP. This was one I hadn't seen in any of the stores. Its cover was brown and unappealing, the guys looked weird, and I first thought it was some kind of bootleg, although I didn't know what a bootleg was.

I placed the vinyl on the turntable, very carefully lining up the needle before slowly lowering the tone arm to the start of the record. Not until I heard "Four!" (Counting off "I Saw Her Standing There"), was I sure it was the real deal. Though the record contained several covers, the Beatle sound was unmistakable. It would be weeks before I ever got to Side Two, however, as I could never get past "Anna." This was the song that taught me to appreciate the distinct differences between the voices of Paul McCartney and John Lennon. It was almost like getting three bands in one. There was John, there was Paul, and there were the Beatles.

Within weeks I would attend another party where the hostess debuted yet another Beatle album. *The Beatles' Second Album* was instantly my favorite yet, primarily because of "You Can't Do That." Now I wondered how many songs these guys had. How long could this possibly last? As it turned out, the Sullivan performance had made a favorable impression on my dad after all. One morning I heard him remark over breakfast, "You know, I saw in the paper the other day that the crime rate in New York City dropped down to almost nothing last Sunday night, because everyone stayed at home to watch the Beatles." It was estimated that more than 73 million people had done exactly that.

Lake Shore Junior High

No one ever said the transition from sixth to seventh grade would be an easy one. In fact, pretty much everyone I talked to guaranteed it would be the most horrific experience of my life. I never quite bought into all that, but it was probably among the top five.

In the fall of 1964, Lake Shore Junior High School (#69) had a student body of about 1800. Some of those who attended school here included Allen Collins, Gary Rossington, Bob Burns, Gene Odom, Dave Hlubeck, Steve Brookins, Rick Doeschler, Taylor Coarse, and Rick Mathews. In fact, Lake Shore's "Most Talented" title would be awarded to Doeschler, Mathews, and my brother, Gregory "Bo" Steele in successive years, all for music.

The school was fed by several elementary schools, including Bayview, Fishweir, Hyde Park, Ortega, Stockton and Venetia. In addition to trying to adapt to the nuances of rigorous schedules, lockers located in different buildings than where you attended classes, along with the diverse personalities of six teachers per day, there also existed a great social divide, the likes of which most of us were not familiar.

While the families of the students from Fishweir, Stockton, Ortega and Venetia were the more affluent, professional types, doctors, lawyers, bankers, and real estate executives, the students from Bayview and Hyde Park came more from blue collar, lower middle class, modest income households. Consequently, the students of Lake Shore were divided into two distinct and diverse groups. The "Hoods," who lived west of U.S.17 and north of the Ortega River, and the "Ortegans," who lived south of the river and east of Roosevelt Blvd, (U.S.17). This division had been in place for many years and may still exist today.

Naturally, each group was groomed to carry a traditional, almost hereditary animosity for the other. In fact, legend held that there be an annual rumble at the end of each school year. Though the threat was ever present, I never actually saw one take place. It is my belief that the notion began to fade as more guys from both sides of the tracks became more involved in team athletics, instilling a camaraderie in which the teammates could not, and would not be divided.

Once I became friends with some of the rich kids, the "Ortegans", I never had a problem with, or even recognized any of the social barriers I had heard so much about.

There were assholes on both sides, as with any school, but certainly no more from one side of the tracks than the other. I also believed the arrival of the Beatles had much to do with this. With so many of the guys in now need of players to form bands with, it no longer seemed to matter where anyone lived. Or what their family's social status might be. These days, the ability to play guitar was just about as important as your ability to play football.

Most of us had spent the majority of our lives in Jacksonville, the Florida city that no one ever talked about. The "Gateway City," as Jacksonville was called, was little more than a gas stop for vacationers on their way to see Florida. When the *Today Show* came on each morning the weather report would usually include Miami and Tampa, but never so much as a mention of lowly Jacksonville. Some of us had resented this for much of our lives, and were getting to the age that we were determined to do something about it. We would either find some way to get the hell out of town, or somehow get Jacksonville on the map. After all, who had ever heard of Liverpool?

On September 10th, 1964 the Jacksonville area was hit head on by Hurricane Dora, which did over \$200 million in damage. More than 20 beachfront homes sank into the Atlantic, along with the entire Jacksonville Beach Pier. Houses and cars were twisted and turned upside down all over the city, while downtown businesses were left under several feet of water. Practically no one had electricity for days, and the Beatles were scheduled to play the Gator Bowl that night.

Because the concert had originally been scheduled for a school night, I realized my chances of seeing them were non-existent, and never really pushed the issue. However, when the concert was moved to Friday night, September 11th, due to the storm, I was pushing the hell out of it. But by this time there was no one available to take me.

There were other factors working against me as well. Because our house was the only one in the neighborhood with a generator, thus the only home with electricity, it had been designated by neighbors and friends as the ideal spot for a hurricane party. And what a party it was.

Drunk adults danced and told salty jokes, played poker, and listened to loud music all night long. Some were singing, laughing their asses off, and handing out wads of cash to us kids each time a naughty word slipped out.

Throughout the night, my dad tried to comfort me about not being able to attend the concert, assuring me the show would likely be cancelled, or at least postponed again, due to continued high winds and power still being out over much of the city. After seeing the Coasters, the Drifters, the Miracles, the Marvelettes, and James Brown, this would have been the first white band I had ever seen.

As I drifted off to sleep that night I thought about President Johnson being in Jacksonville that day, to assess the damage from the storm. I was relieved that no one had shot him, making Jacksonville another evil city, equal to Dallas.

Part II

James William Rice 1952-2001

James Rice and I became friends in the fall of 1964 when I began 7th grade at Lake Shore. James was in my first period math class and just about all the rest of my classes that year. I sort of knew him, he and his faithful canine companion, "Rebel," from around the neighborhood, but we had never really talked before ending up in the same classrooms together. We immediately hit it off, I suppose because we were alike in many ways. We both loved music, baseball, wrestling and girls, in no particular order.

All the girls thought James was "cute." He was barely five feet tall, his long blond locks probably weighed more than he did, and he had big, crystal blue eyes. If Carly Simon had written that song of hers in 1964, he probably would have thought it was about him. He knew how to talk shit and how to keep the girls following him around. James was cool, and he didn't mind telling you that you were not.

James was also a bully, (for his size), and couldn't give a rat's ass about someone else's feelings if he could get a good laugh at their expense. In that regard we were polar opposites. This would sometimes get James into trouble, when he picked on someone who wasn't having any of his bullshit. It was for this reason that he needed me to be dragged into the middle of things when he was about to get his ass kicked. It should be noted here that I wasn't much bigger than he was, so I wasn't necessarily happy with the arrangement. But he was my buddy. James needed me and I needed him, because I wanted to learn from him how to take about half those little girls off his hands. This was how we started out. But, all joking aside, he was my very dear friend until his death in 2001.

One morning James came skidding into math class. He was running late as usual, but this wasn't why he was moving so fast.

"You're friends with Allen Collins, right?" he blurted out.

I just nodded my head, as our teacher was already staring a hole through us. His sarcasm came quick and thick.

"Mister Rice... If it's okay with you, I would like to get started with our quiz."

As James scurried to his desk, Mister Gerding continued walking the aisles, distributing our tests along with very specific instructions. "As you finish your test, please leave it face down on your desk and kindly wait for me to pick it up. Do not raise your hands. Mr. Steele, Mr. Rice... You may resume your conversation in the hall upon completion of your tests." We met in the hall about twenty minutes later.

"Man! Allen Collins got a new electric guitar!" James began.

"Yeah, but I'm not sure he can really play it." I replied.

"It's his second one, and he's been learning from Donnie Ulsh!" James said.

"Who told you that?" I inquired.

"Allen told me!" James answered. "He's been learning from Donnie Ulsh!"

"Donnie Ulsh? ... The guy with the flattop? ... Plays basketball? He plays guitar?"

This was extremely exciting news, as James and I had been talking about getting something together since the school year began. James already had a drum set, and I had wanted to start a band since Rick Mathews turned me on to the Beach Boys. After seeing the Beatles on *Ed Sullivan*, that was it. It had to happen somehow. The only thing stopping us before had been the same problem that

many other kids faced at the time. Either you knew someone who could play, but had no guitar, or the kid had the guitar, but couldn't play it.

Immediately after class, James and I cornered Allen in the hall. I asked Allen if he really could play, and if he wanted to start a band. Allen said yes to both, but insisted that he would only play rhythm guitar, that he had no desire to play lead.

"Hey! I'm getting a new Gibson!" Allen boasted. "It's a Melody Maker, cause that's what rhythm guitar players play!"

"Well, who can we get to play lead?" I asked.

"Donnie Ulsh! This guy's the best I ever heard!" Allen said without blinking.

"Donnie Ulsh? The basketball player? The guy with the crew cut?"

"That's him, swear to God!" Allen said. "He may not look like it, but he can play shit outta lead!"

"You think he'd play with us?"

"Hell yeah!" Allen quipped. "He wants to get in a band too!"

That night I announced to my mom and dad that James, Allen and I were planning to put a band together. "Well, what are you going to play?" my dad inquired.

"I'm going to play bass, like George Harrison!" I announced proudly, having incorrectly assumed that George had to be the bassist, as his guitar had the largest body.

"But you don't have a bass guitar." I was reminded. "What do you plan to do about that?"

Damn! I was completely stumped. I had been so preoccupied with finding others who could play, I hadn't even thought about myself. All I had was my old Stella box guitar, which was great for strumming chords and picking out melody lines for "Tom Dooley," or "Greenback Dollar," but it sure as hell wasn't going to help me with this new job I had chosen for myself. Come to think of it, I had no idea how anyone would even go about playing bass.

Later that night, I was wide awake, contemplating my dilemma, when my dad's silhouette appeared in the doorway. "I'll tell you what," he almost whispered from the open door.

"We'll get Rick (Mathews) to stay over Friday night. We'll get up Saturday morning and hit the pawn shops. Since Rick's already in a band, he should be able to help us find what we're looking for."

When Saturday arrived the three of us went down to West Bay Street, checking out the shops, a couple of which were owned by friends of my dad. I was definitely excited, but found myself in a precarious position. It was already obvious to me that my dad would prefer doing business with one of his Shriner buddies. It was equally obvious that Rick, the experienced musician, was naturally going to side with my dad, the grownup. If one of Daddy's buddies didn't have what I wanted I was screwed!

After barely escaping a white, Kay hollow body, with a headstock twice the size of my own head, and various other monstrosities of equal ugly, we ended up at American Music Store, where we met a really nice young salesman. David Griffin was polite, friendly, funny, and most importantly, a bass player for the Jokers. He and my dad immediately liked each other, and I could tell Daddy was going to buy whatever David recommended.

"Well you're just the guy we're looking for," my dad said. "My son here is just starting out."

"So you want to play bass, huh?" David asked, turning his attention to me. "Well, let me show you what I have," he said, already walking to the back of the store. He returned shortly, carrying a brown vinyl case. He unzipped the bag and produced a shiny, red Kent bass. It was exactly the body

style I had envisioned myself playing. He handed the bass over to me, then turned back to my dad. "Now sir, I want to make it clear that this is not an instrument of the highest quality, not by a long shot. But I believe, for the money, it's the best beginner's bass that anyone can offer."

I had already fallen in love with it. The neck was thick, with no action at all, but the body was small, like me, and it had a single chrome pickup and matching chrome machine heads that were pretty close to standard size. It had a little silver sticker on the back of the headstock that read "Made in Japan," which was a bad thing in those days. I didn't care. Brand be damned! I didn't know how to play it anyway. This was all about looking cool, truth be told.

About ten minutes later we left the store with the Kent bass and a Silvertone 1483 bass amp, just like the one I'd seen in the Sears catalog, all for \$125.

That afternoon we all met up at James' house, Donnie Ulsh, Allen Collins, James and myself. By dark we had decided we'd call ourselves "The Mods," after the well-dressed, musical subculture in England that we had read about in *Tiger Beat* magazine. We would also have a repertoire of 3 songs, "Louie Louie," "Wipeout" and "Green Onions." Here we go!

The Mods

There is nothing so sweet, or memorable, as the aroma that emanates from a hard shell guitar case. When I walked into that first day of practice, in James' living room, the scent of fine woods and Finger Ease filled the air, assuring me that I was in the right place. To this day I think of the music stores, the nightclub dressing rooms and the birth of The Mods each time a guitar case is opened. This is truly the one fragrance I enjoy more so than that of a vintage barroom.

When I arrived that Saturday afternoon my enthusiasm had reached the level of a small child, getting his first puppy. The two guitar players were all set up, Donnie with a Cherry Gibson ES -335, a Hummingbird and a Gibson Invader amp. Allen had his brand new Gibson Melody Maker, as promised, and a tiny Truetone amp with an eight-inch speaker. Along with James' Oyster Pearl Ludwig drums, (sans floor tom), it was already an impressive setup. But among all the Gibson guitars, I was already feeling a little weird about my selection of the Japanese bass.

Once we got everything inside we talked for some time about who our favorite groups were, (Beatles, Stones, Animals), the songs we wanted to play, and who could or could not sing. Some of the songs suggested hinted that these guys were considerably more advanced than myself, causing me to wonder if I would be able to keep up with them. While I could play chords, and had damn good rhythm, I was now supposed to be a bass player, whatever the hell that was. But if I didn't play bass, who would? And where then would I fit in?

As Allen, James and I continued to talk, Donnie pulled out his Hummingbird and began playing a Bob Dylan song that I had never before heard, "Chimes of Freedom." Once Donnie began to sing there was no question about who our singer would be. It would become equally obvious who would lead the band, when Donnie strapped on his 335. The rest of us would be doing pretty much whatever Donnie said; that is, if we could ever get him to say anything.

Practicing in the beginning would be limited to Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Saturday mornings were reserved for riding the bus downtown, to the music stores. Sunday mornings were

reserved for those of us who attended church, specifically Donnie and me. We decided also that the next thing we needed, (that every band had), was a business card.

Donnie Ulsh was quiet and reserved, rarely having anything to say when the band was first formed. He would eventually take charge of our musical direction once he realized it was he who possessed the superior talent and the knowledge the rest of us sorely lacked.

Allen, right from the get-go, was wound up to a hundred miles per hour. He had been this way for as long as I'd known him, but with a guitar in his hands was out of control. He would play a C chord when he was supposed to be playing F, and vice versa. He frequently made mistakes and played chords that didn't exist, but worked harder than anyone to hone his craft. Allen knew he wasn't very good, but knew he would be, and would stop at nothing to better himself.

James was a decent drummer and had a lot of ideas of his own, though they weren't always in line with the rest of us. One example was his crusade to have a sax player.

James and I, along with Bob Burns, who was also looking to start a band, spent more than a few Saturday nights at Westside Teen Club, checking out the older, better bands who played there. Two of our favorite bands were Tiny & the Surfers, and The Vikings, who featured the first singing drummer I had ever seen, Butch Trucks. Because both of these bands had sax players, James believed we needed one too, though we didn't play a single song that included sax and didn't plan to. As for my own contribution to the band, I was clearly the weakest link of the chain. I could play by ear, but if you told me what note to play, I rarely knew where to find it. Without Donnie and Allen there to help me figure out my parts, I would still be lost today.

One Saturday night after a particularly frustrating practice, I was sitting on my back porch, listening to local country favorite, Wendell Griffin, on the *Jimmy Strickland Show*. In the distance I could faintly hear the sound of electric guitars. Realizing it must be my friend, Tommy Crenshaw, and his brother-in-law, Billy, a couple of blocks over, I decided to head over to join them. This was always a lot of fun, as they were old enough to drink and did so. They'd ice down a case of beer and sit out in the front yard, with no shirts on, playing away until either the beer was gone or the law arrived. They had this Chuck Berry thing, with a lot of bar chords going on when I pulled up on my bike.

When they finished the song, Tommy began to show Billy the next tune he had in mind, beginning with a bar on the twelfth fret. As he strummed along he sang out each chord he was playing. "E-E-E-E-E-E-D-D-D-D-D-A-A-A-A-A-E." It was as if a window had cracked open, and light was trying to seep in. There seemed to be a pattern here that I could somewhat understand. I pointed to the sixth fret of Tommy's guitar.

"What's that?" I inquired.

"That's A #, then B, C, and then C# ," Tommy said, moving up the neck.

"There's no B# or E#, but that's how it works."

Handing his guitar over to me, he said, "Make an E chord without using your index finger." This was awkward, and not the way I'd learned to play a bar chord, but I did as I was told.

"Now move up one fret and bar it. That's F, the next one's F# and the next one's G. It just keeps on going from there. But remember, there's no E# or B#."

Amazed at how incredibly simple it all seemed, I was overcome with relief. I suddenly felt less stupid. This one little session had opened up a whole new world to me, where everything was now so

much clearer. I may not know my scales quite yet, but I damn sure knew where all the notes were. I couldn't wait to apply this newly acquired knowledge to our next rehearsal.

Look ma! I'm playin' bass!

One of the highlights of starting a band is when you first realize you're actually making music together. The memory I hope I never lose is of The Mods, on the final chorus of the Van Morrison song, "Gloria." We had just come out of the guitar break, bringing the music down real low, where Donnie started whispering what is best described as the bridge:

"You know she come around here... Just about midnight..... You know she make me feel so good..... You know she make me feel alright... "

By the time we reached the chorus, where Donnie spelled out, "G-L-O-R-I-A," as Allen and I sang "Glo--ria!" behind him, (all into the same microphone), it seemed like magic. We were all looking at each other, trying to act as though this was the expected result, while inside we were all about to bust. One more guitar break later, we were all thinking, "Hell yeah! We can do this!"

Up until that very special moment it had been about getting the girls. Now, strangely enough, it was all about making music, and getting better at it.

The first time we ever played in front of anyone was at a patio party held by my parents. We weren't paid anything for the gig, but one of our neighbors, Richard Stang, was interested in managing our little band and wanted to see how we might perform under pressure. What greater pressure could there be than a 12 year old kid trying desperately not to embarrass his mom and dad in the presence of their closest friends?

Our second gig was another party. This one was a birthday party for Allen's step-sister, at the home of Allen's father, Larkin Collins Sr. We were supposed to have been paid a whopping 50 bucks for this one, though we never saw a cent of it.

Bookings weren't so plentiful in 1964, for the Mods, or any other band who had only been together for a couple of months and whose members were 12 years old. We were now practicing at Richard Stang's house, where one afternoon he came in with unbelievably good news. Richard had actually booked an audition for us at Westside Teen Club, which to us was comparable to Madison Square Garden. This was where all the real bands performed, and the same place that James and I had been sneaking into because we were not yet 13 years old.

On the day of the audition we set up on the floor in front of the main stage, where I couldn't take my eyes off all the Fender gear and the sparkling drum set behind us. There was a single flood light shining overhead as we played before several faceless spectators, all sitting with Richard at a table in the back of the room. While it was a little unnerving, not being able to see the reactions from any of the jury, it was a great relief to at least hear some scattered applause in between numbers. We were just beginning to feel pretty good about our chances when the manager came out. As soon as he caught a glimpse of us, what had been a warm, friendly smile suddenly turned to an expression of shock and disappointment.

"Richard...the band sounds pretty good," he said, still staring at us. "They're just too damn young. If I put these kids in here the girls would eat 'em alive and the guys would beat 'em up. Bring 'em back to see me in a year or two." Needless to say, we were crushed.

During the weekends when we had no place to play, we took the opportunity to experience as many other bands as we possibly could, from starters like ourselves to the best in town. One never knew where he might pick something up, or who he might learn it from. Good bands, bad bands – it didn't matter. Knowing there was something to be learned from all of them, we'd go wherever they'd allow us in.

One of my buddies from school, David Kwartler, talked me into going with him to see the Dave Clark Five at the Jacksonville Coliseum in December of 1964. I wasn't a huge DC5 fan, primarily because some of the local radio folks implied from time to time that they were equal to, if not better than, The Beatles. Not one to tolerate such blasphemy, I had tried to stay clear of that camp altogether. But they were good, they had huge hits, and they were a major component of the British Invasion. Besides, I was still pretty upset about missing the Beatles just a few months earlier. I wasn't going to miss any more concerts ever, if it could be helped.

I remembered the Dave Clark Five for many years following that show, not for being good or bad, or even influential on that night; but for being so very unprofessional. And the worst of the lot seemed to be Dave Clark himself.

As the crowd screamed and little girls cried, demonstrating much the same kind of hysteria as generated by the Beatles, the band exploded onto the stage with all the power and charm you could imagine. They had gotten through about a verse and chorus of "Glad All Over" before Clark began cutting his eyes over toward keyboardist/singer, Mike Smith, with a look of total frustration. It appeared that Smith picked up on this but chose to ignore it, rather focusing his attention back to the audience. Seconds later Clark threw his sticks to the stage floor and stormed off the stage. The rest of the band soon followed.

A few minutes later they returned to the stage, beginning the song for a second time, with almost the same result. Clark was again wearing a contemptuous sneer, his eyes cutting between Smith and the audience. Again the sticks were slammed to the floor as he rose from his throne, angrily snatching a towel from a floor tom as he again exited the stage.

In my mind, there was jealousy afoot, as lead singer Mike Smith had instantly captured the undivided attention and admiration of the audience, upsetting the band's namesake to the point that he refused to perform. It was so painfully obvious to me that it was all about ego that I never considered the possibility of any other contributing factor.

What I believed for years to be the moral of the story from this event was, no matter how big a band might become, it was still possible for something as trivial as jealousy among its members to prevent the group from performing up to its full potential. Sorely missing from the Dave Clark Five, in my opinion, had been the preferred mixture of class and professionalism required to perform at rock star level. It would be almost seventeen years before I realized how very wrong I had been about Dave Clark on that particular night.

1965

With 1965 came more bands, and a lot more songs to be learned. "Satisfaction," "Hang on Sloopy," "The Last Time," "For Your Love," "My Girl," and "Ticket to Ride" were just a few of the songs that would become monster hits, yet were simple enough for us newbies to learn.

Once school was out, The Mods began rehearsing every day. Listening to records on James' living room hi-fi, we learned each song by continuously lifting the needle up and down from the turntable, allowing Donnie to figure out his guitar breaks while the rest of us attempted to write down the correct lyrics. We were now doing more Animals and Stones songs, and had switched from Tarrytons to L&M cigarettes, because that's what the Stones smoked. But shortly before the end of school, an American band came along that suddenly stole our attention.

For me it was *Hullabaloo* where I first witnessed the Byrds. From the opening verse of "Mr. Tambourine Man," this was who and what I wanted to be. Their songs were different, but very appealing, as they spoke of things other than love and heartache. Instead, their songs were about youth, war, politics and protests. The harmonies, the Rickenbacker 12-String, Gene Clark's hair, and the fact that they were an American band were all contributing factors to my intense desire to be exactly like them. Their music was referred to as "Folk rock."

I had been scheduled to go with my dad for a haircut at nearby Roosevelt Mall, the day after seeing the Byrds. By the time he came home to fetch me, at around 3:30, I had climbed a tree in our back yard, where I intended to stay. Thinking he would eventually give up the search and go along without me, I would remain in the tree for hours.

As it turned out, several of the Byrds' tunes, including "Mr. Tambourine Man," were written by Bob Dylan, who was Donnie's favorite musician. Because Donnie and Allen had both seen the same show, and been equally impressed, the Mods would now begin learning every Byrd's song we could possibly play.

On the first Friday night of summer vacation, Allen Collins, James Rice and I were at a dance at The Church of the Good Shepherd on Stockton Street. This was the place to be, particularly for the junior high school crowd, and always had the very best bands. We were there, of course, not to dance, but to check out the finest band in the Southeast at the time. The Dalton Gang featured guitarist Auburn Burrell, whom everyone believed would be next to hit the bigtime, and bass player/guitar salesman extraordinaire, David Griffin.

While it was still daylight, the three of us and Bob Burns decided to walk down to the Little Brown Jug on Edison Avenue to cop some beer. I should point out that, contrary to popular belief, Lynyrd Skynyrd, nor any other white band, ever played here, nor was it a place where Ronnie Van Zant ever cut a rug. This was simply one of a few places on the Westside where young white boys had a connection for acquiring adult beverages.

Just behind LBJ's lived an old black man everyone referred to as "Shaky." The common practice was to knock on Shaky's door, give him the cash and the order, (ours being a six pack of Colt 45 tall boys), and wait for his return with the brew, minus one for his trouble.

We were standing around an empty lot behind LBJ's, drinking malt liquor and discussing bands, when Bob mentioned that he was pretty sure 4+1 was playing just a few blocks away, at Green Street Youth Center. We decided that after the Dalton Gang's first set we would high tail it over to Green Street for a few minutes to check them out.

We had watched most of 4+1's second set, when we decided we'd better begin the walk back to Good Shepherd. On the way out the door, however, James hit upon some scuzzy little blonde who had

been all over everyone the last time we had played there. Before we could say don't do it, James was dragging ass behind us with a big ass grin and his arm wrapped around this little thing's waist.

As Allen and I discussed how neither of us would be caught dead with such a whore, James and the girl were busy trading slobber and giggles, all the while severely hindering our progress back to see the Daltons.

We were about two blocks down Myra Street when I recognized the distinct sound of shoe taps, echoing down the road behind us. I turned to look, catching the outlines of six or seven neighborhood toughs beneath the streetlight. They were now beginning to pick up speed, and it was obviously us they were after.

I hollered back to James that it was now time to haul serious ass, but he was much too involved with his little girlfriend to pay me any mind. The gang was now gaining on James fast, and none of them looked like their intentions were good. I turned to Allen, "Come on, man! We gotta do somethin'!" Allen stood there for a second, assessing the situation as the gang continued to close in on still unsuspecting James. He shot one quick glance back at me and took off like bat out of hell.

I couldn't help thinking of PF Flyers as I watched Allen, ass and elbows, round the next corner and disappear into the night. The next thing I knew, there were fists and feet flying everywhere, punches to the face, to the kidneys and to the head, with James and I being the recipients of most of those blows. In the midst of the chaos, I could have sworn I could still hear Allen, pickin' 'em up and puttin' 'em down, from a couple of blocks over, while James and I took what at that moment seemed the beating of our lives.

A few seconds later it was just James and I continuing our walk back to Good Shepherd. All we had to show for ourselves were busted lips, bloody noses, and wild declarations of certain vengeance. Neither of us were seriously hurt.

All I could think about was Allen burning up that pavement. Now that it was all over with, the whole thing seemed funny as hell to me, though James didn't seem to get it. Now I was trying to imagine what kind of story Allen would tell to everyone back at Good Shepherd.

As it turned out, he had been completely truthful.

"I hauled ass as soon as I knew they were gonna try to fight them guys."

Pretty sound logic, with which I could not argue.

Because the Mods were scheduled to play the same youth center the following weekend, it was decided that we should take along a few of our older and larger friends as reinforcements.

Ronnie Evans, who usually hauled the band's gear around for us, suggested that we take along a couple of his buddies, one of which was home on leave from Marine boot camp. The plan for Friday night was to simply climb into the van and disappear, once we were through playing. But on Saturday night we would load our equipment into the van, then hang around, allowing the van to leave without any of the band members aboard. We would then begin the same walk as the week before, while Ronnie and the others were just around the corner, lying in wait.

Long story short, they walked right into the trap. The guys who had a chance to do so hauled ass immediately upon sensing the setup. Others suffered minor, but nonetheless incapacitating injuries, which left them laying about the street. We actually got the last laugh for a change.

As the end of summer neared, there were even more songs to play, as the British Invasion continued to provide. By now we had been introduced to the Who, The Kinks, and the Yardbirds, while the Beatles and Stones continued to produce more music than they ever had before.

There were also bands who we *thought* were British, like the Beau Brummels, and Sir Douglas Quintet. But the group that continued to hold our attention, especially my own, was the Byrds. What a wondrous time to be a young musician, where the more you learned, the more you wanted to. And while the new material seemed a bit more sophisticated, so too was our ability to play. We had heard all our lives that practice makes perfect. And while we were a far cry from perfection, we were definitely getting better.

When we went back to school to begin eighth grade, there seemed to be an abundance of new students, including one who, according to rumor, had moved to Jacksonville from California. The guy actually claimed to be the former rhythm guitarist of The Doors.

While the Doors were yet to make any records, let alone become famous, they were probably the most frequently mentioned west coast band in the teen magazines. Because I had read several articles on them, I couldn't wait to meet this guy who had the balls to create such an unbelievable backstory, and had already gained a number fans around school as a result.

One afternoon found the two of us walking in opposite directions down the same hallway, while classes were in session. Because there were very few people in the hall to distract us, we couldn't help eyeing each other as we passed. When I nodded my head, the universal junior high school gesture for "whussup," Dave responded with a nod of his own, causing me to turn right back around.

"Hey, man. Aren't you David?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm David," he answered.

"And you're from California?" I inquired, suspecting this to be more bullshit.

"Yep. Sure am."

"I hear you were the rhythm guitarist for The Doors." I said, baiting the guy for the denial.

"That's right! How ya doing, man?" he quipped, extending his hand with a big smile.

(This guy was unbelievable!)

"Well, The Doors don't even have a bass player, much less a rhythm guitar player." I laughed.

"Well, duh! That's because I moved to Jacksonville!" Dave said, flashing another big smile.

With that, Dave Hlubek turned and walked away. I was dumbfounded. The guy hadn't so much as flinched at any of my questions, and was obviously sticking to this incredible story. Knowing he was full of shit, I couldn't help admiring the fact that he wasn't about to back down.

The next time I heard anything on Dave Hlubek, it was the news that he really had put his own band together. But they were not the Doors.

Obstacles

One of the major challenges of having a band has always been getting together enough of the right kind of equipment. Even in the 60s, your public address system was the largest and most important financial commitment your band would ever make. Most everyone had his own amp, guitar, or drum kit, usually provided by the parents in one way or another. But a key element of the whole “band experience” was the group commitment to contribute to the PA acquisition. In some parts of town this contribution was typically made in the form of cash. On our side of the tracks, however, it was sometimes necessary to put the system together a piece at a time, by whatever means necessary.

For the Mods at this time, the needs were quite extensive in this area, while Priority One was an additional microphone of some quality. Beatles and Byrd’s covers required harmony vocals to back up the lead singer, which were impossible to deliver without quality mics. One of those big, wide Shure models, like Paul and George sometimes shared would do nicely.

One morning, all the students were herded into the school gymnasium for some kind of presentation, about what, I can’t remember. What I do recall was that the announcements were being broadcast over a Bogen Challenger public address amp, with gray, detachable speakers. The microphone connected to that Challenger amp, which made the announcements so crisp and clear, just happened to be a Shure Synodyne, and the whole little system was being transported on a single metal push cart.

Instead of paying attention to the program, Donnie, Allen, James and I, were discussing how this little outfit was all we needed to allow the band to step up to the next level. Because our parents had already come through for us with the purchase of our individual instruments, we felt it was up to us to get our sound system together without again running to them for help.

That Friday, James and I were sitting in the school library, looking up something we needed for Ms. Taylor’s English class. We were sitting across from each other at the same table when James began nodding his head in my direction, as if something was coming up behind me. With my back to the wall, I knew this wasn’t likely, but the spasmodic head bobbing continued until I was forced to turn and look behind me. Someone had left the supply room door open, revealing the very cart which contained the much desired public address system. The cart was positioned right up against an outside jalousie window. All any skinny person, (Allen), would have to do was slip through the window, ease up front to unlock the main door, and we could roll the cart right out; amplifier, microphone, the whole damned works.

I had never stolen anything in my life, nor had I considered it. Allen, on the other hand, had once stolen a ten dollar, low gain, ribbon microphone from a Parts Unlimited store, leaving me at the counter, swearing I’d never seen him before, while James would steal anything that wasn’t nailed down. But desperate times called for stupid measures. And before everything, including good sense, came the band.

We agreed that Donnie should be left out of the caper altogether. The risk of losing him to military school was too great. I considered trying to get out of it myself, but my house, being in close proximity to the school, made that impossible. I reasoned that the school could better afford to replace the

equipment than we could afford to buy it. Besides, our parents had paid the tax dollars used to procure the shit to begin with, right?

Because the system was chained to the rolling cart we had somehow convinced ourselves that it would be possible to maneuver the beast over about fifty yards of soft sand, before reaching Cambridge Road, our planned route of escape. Once there we would simply roll the cart down to Bayview Road, then down the nine blocks of busted sidewalk to my house on Palmer Street. Of course, none of this would look at all suspicious--three teenagers pushing a cart full of electronics down the sidewalk on a Saturday night.

On the night of the heist, the three of us sneaked onto the school campus by way of the track, behind the school, as this was the approach with the fewest number of surrounding homes. The library was in the center of the campus, surrounded by the rear of the main building, the adjacent cafeteria, and two portable classrooms, which had once been army barracks. The two portables perfectly shadowed the library building, providing great cover by which to make entry through the library window.

As we settled into position we noticed a family, cooking out in their front yard on the far side of Cambridge Road. We could clearly hear them laughing and talking, so it was obvious that they would be able to hear us as well. Realizing we could no longer consider breaking the window, our only option was to use leverage to somehow force the window open. The problem with that was we had brought along no tools. Adding to our difficulties, Allen had now disappeared.

The key to the success of any mission is your selection of the right team. This is especially true when undertaking such a covert operation as ours. But, while we would have been hard pressed to find another bandmate as good as Allen, he was certainly not the guy to have around when stealth was imperative.

James and I eventually decided to abort the whole PA idea, opting instead for just the microphone and stand. Even if it was physically possible, there was no way we were going to push the cart away from the building, through the soft sand and past the neighbors without being detected. James had suggested wrapping his shirt around his fist to punch out the glass, insisting it would make no noise, but I knew better. What we would do was take our time, giving the roll out window short, steady jerks, gradually separating it from its framework a quarter inch at the time.

I was eventually able to provide just enough clearance for James to slip his hand through the open space and remove the mic stand from the cart. As I continued to pull on the window, James shoved his arm through the small opening, bumping the cart and pushing it farther away from the window. Now even the microphone was out of reach.

Suddenly, every light in the library came up, illuminating the night sky. It looked like high noon over the entire courtyard, with our dumb asses standing right in its center. "Grab the mic! Grab the mic!" I heard James holler, not knowing who he could possibly be shouting to. As I peered through the window I could see Allen, casually strolling across the library floor with a cardboard box under one arm. "Hey, Y'all!" He hollered. "I found a shitload of ice cream sandwiches over there in the cafeteria!"

"Allen!! Grab that mic and get the hell out of there!" I screamed, now running to the front of the building, to the door where Allen had apparently entered.

The Cambridge Road escape no longer an option, I grabbed the mic stand from Allen and took off down the sidewalk, fleeing past the shops, the music building and the weight room, right back to the track where we had come in. I was crossing the infield when James caught up with me, Allen running close behind, carrying the box of ice cream sandwiches with one hand and feeding himself with the other.

We made our way across the track, through an opening in the fence and across the Optimist football field to Hamilton Street. The mic and stand were already getting heavy. As we cautiously and nervously made our way home, Allen made a comment between bites of ice cream.

“Hey, y’all ... Look at that damn plug. We ain’t never gonna be able to hook that up to anything we got!” He laughed. I looked down at the plug to discover he was right. I had seen the type before, but had no clue as to what it was or what it was used for. Besides committing my first, (and last), burglary, this would turn out to be an educational experience as well. For now we would be forced to learn about Low Impedance and XLR connectors. This rock ‘n roll business was getting tougher by the minute!