

Dino Dave: Musical memoirs of a would-be guitar hero.

Forward

First off, that's Dino Dave, as in *Dinosaur*. Not pronounced *Deeno*, like De Laurentiis, Dean Martin's nickname, or the Flintstone's pet, who happened to also be a Dinosaur. The story of how I got that nickname is just one of the stories in the following pages. My whole life, I have been passionate about music — particularly heavy ROCK music! That passion led me to becoming a *highly unsuccessful*, and widely *not sought-after* semi-professional guitarist, songwriter, producer, and guitar website founder.

My tale is common for the 99.99% of all musicians who dreamed, and fell short of Rock stardom. Perhaps you're such a person yourself. Or maybe someone you know or love never made it in music. Maybe they still play in local bar bands. Or maybe they just crank up their amps in the bedroom, close their eyes and imagine they're on stage at MSG or Wembley. There are zillions of us who never made it, who never lost our love of playing music.

I've been luckier than most in that I've been able to make (and record) some music that I am proud of. It's a glorious legacy that millions of music fans will never hear and enjoy! The fact that no one will ever hear it is beside the point. I, and those like me, make music because music is a passion, and a *creative outlet*. We do it for *ourselves*. Because like the Monkees, *we've got something to say*. We do it for the same reasons *anyone who creates art* does it. *Because we must*. It's human nature. It's in our DNA.



So if you've been through a similar journey to mine, perhaps you'll read this story, laugh, and relate. If someone you love lived this journey, but doesn't anymore, maybe give them a few more minutes before you bang on the door and tell them to turn down.

Dino Dave (recent). Cheers!

1. Musical Youth

I think the earliest memory is a musical memory. That of my mother, dancing around with me in her arms, waiting for my Dad to get home from work. This would have been 1966 at the latest. The Beatles were coming out of the hi-fi. Not that my parents owned any Beatles albums. My parents were hopelessly square. It would have been on the radio. In later years, when pressed, my mother would admit to having “not minded the Beatles.” Especially compared to what she’d hear blasting out of my bedroom later.

My parents’ musical tastes were not only hopelessly square, but also hopelessly *White*. They were both a bit too old when Rock n Roll arrived. My Dad saw Elvis live, in 1955, before Elvis really blew up. My Dad would have been 21. *He hated it*. After the show, Dad saw Elvis outside — *leaving the building*, in his black leather jacket. Dad said Elvis “looked like one of the greaser hoodlums in his Brooklyn neighborhood when he was growing up.” My Dad was a wonderful man. But as far as music went, *he was so square he was a cube!* He liked opera, classical music, and the kind of 50s romance music he thought put women in the mood. Montovani — stuff like that.

My mother’s tastes were slightly better, though still, very white. She did enjoy Nat King Cole, and Ella Fitzgerald. Though I don’t remember hearing either around the house much. She, too, loved opera and classical music. I also remember hearing a few Barbara Streisand albums. But mostly a lot of *very white pop*. Stuff like The Lettermen, and The 5th Dimension — a black pop band who sounded white.

My mother was also musical. As a child, she sang on the radio. She once played the child’s role in a local production of *Madame Butterfly*. She was exposed to piano early in life, and we had a piano in the house. By 1973, my father bought my mother a big, Baldwin parlor organ with a full pedal board (think Hammond or church organ). It cost \$5000 in 1973. By comparison, our new, 73 Chevy Impala cost \$3000.

For the first few years mom had the organ, she played it regularly. The organ came with recorded lessons, and she did those for a while. She mostly played by ear. I remember that she drove me crazy playing *Alley Cat*, and *The Entertainer*, by Scott Joplin (also known as the theme to the 70s movie, *The Sting*). She played more than those, but she ran those two into the ground. Later, I’d get even by driving by her and my father crazy with my music. So any musicality or musical talent that I possess, came from my mother. Poor Dad couldn’t carry a tune in a bucket.

Early Musical Experiences and Influences

As I mentioned, long before the organ, we had a piano in the house. When I was four years old, my parents sent me for piano lessons. I hated it. Me, and two kids from a *very* musical family next door would carpool to lessons once a week. Those kids were forced to go whether they liked it or not. My parents let me quit after about six months when they realized I had no interest in it. My desire to play music didn't crystallize for another decade.

I was too obstinate for piano lessons. Even if I'd been a few years older I probably still would have hated it. Looking back now, I wish I'd stuck with it, even for a little while. It would have taught me music theory, and made me a better overall musician. There were certainly times where being able to play keys would have been handy. Alas, it wasn't to be.

Though I didn't yet have the urge to play an instrument, music was a part of my childhood. I was six years old listening to kiddie records around the time the Partridge Family hit on TV. I loved that! Their tight, pop songs definitely energized me, and remember getting their albums and rocking out — as it were, on air guitar.

Around this same time, I began listening to WRKO, Boston AM radio with DJ Dale Doorman, back when a DJ was just someone who played records on the radio. I think the format must have been Top 40, but this was the early 70s, and there was a lot of Rock music in the Top 40. There were also lots of novelty songs on the radio — things like *The Streak* — that kids like me found hilarious.

I was an only child with no older siblings to turn me on to music. I had two older cousins that exposed me to music that eventually became very important to me. One cousin turned me on to Paul Simon — particularly his first solo album. The other turned me on to Elton John (who I was already hearing on the radio). Elton was becoming the biggest musical act in the world. Later, she would also turn me on to Led Zeppelin.

The Beatles were always present. They still are, and will always be present in my life. Around that time, I was wearing out the Beatles blue 1967-1970 double album. I didn't know it then, but the Beatles, Elton, and Paul Simon would become foundational pillars of my melodic, and pop sense as a musician. So by age nine, I was certainly well into Rock music, albeit the poppier side of it.

The other place I was hearing Rock music — oddly enough — was in elementary school. Our classroom's recess area had books, board games, and a record player. By 3rd grade, a few of us started bringing in albums to listen to during recess.

This was an eye-opening experience for me, and the first time I was exposed to more truly *Rock* things. I had a friend named Carl who brought in amazing albums. Through Carl, I first heard Deep Purple's *Burn*, Yes's *Fragile*, Jethro Tull's *Aqualung*, Paul McCartney & Wings' *Band on the Run*, and Mike Oldfield's *Tubular Bells*. Someone else brought in Jim Croce, who sang story songs about *Leroy Brown* and *Jim* — he, of whom *you don't mess around with!* I brought in my Elton John and Paul Simon albums to share. Around this time, I also first heard Queen. *Killer Queen / Flick of the Wrist* was the first Rock 45 I ever bought.

My allowance started going toward buying albums — when someone would drive me to a record store, which wasn't that often. Christmas became the time my cousins and I would score a bunch of albums. We'd make our lists of the albums we wanted, and we mostly got all of them because it was an easy, one-stop shopping gift for all the aunts and uncles.

Sick as a dog

When I was 10 years old, something weird (in retrospect) happened. I got sick with a flu that really kicked my ass. I was home in bed, and missed at least a week of school. There were few signs of let up or improvement. One afternoon, my dad called me from his office to check on me. He asked, "Is there anything I can bring you to make you feel better?"

I'd been hearing a new song on the radio at that time. *Same Old Song and Dance*, by Aerosmith. It was the coolest song I'd ever heard. Quite different from anything I'd heard at that point. I knew from WRKO radio the song was on their new album called *Get Your Wings*, so I asked my father to bring me that album. And oddly enough, he did. He'd never done anything like that before, and he never did it again.

As he handed the album to me that night, he said, referring to the band picture on the cover, "Those are some of the ugliest girls I've ever seen." I don't know if my *so-square-he's-a-cube* father really thought they were girls, or if he was just being snarky. When I dropped the needle on it, it didn't matter. Things for me would never be the same.

Well, well, Lordy my God, What do we got here?

For a kid growing up in the Boston suburbs in the 70s, Aerosmith was my birthright. By the time Dad brought home *Get your Wings*, Aerosmith was a Boston institution. Boston

radio played them, but they still hadn't broken nationally. I'd heard *Same Old Song and Dance*, but I knew nothing more about them.

As soon as *Get your Wings* started swirling through my room, it was clear it was like nothing else I'd experienced before. Unlike my poppy Elton John and Paul Simon albums, with their bright, colorful, non-threatening album covers, *Get Your Wings* was *dark looking*. The cover art features a black and white photo of the band on a black background. It was darker than anything I'd ever seen to that point (Spinal Tap's *Smell the Glove* came much later).

Aerosmith *themselves* looked menacing. They weren't smiling like Elton or Paul. They positively *glared* at you from that cover, with their long, Rock star hair, and their leather and denim attire. *These guys looked like they were up to no good at all* (which in 1974, was totally true). From my perspective as a kid in an upscale, white-collar, suburban neighborhood, Aerosmith *looked dangerous*. If I'd seen them on a street corner, I'd have crossed the street.

More importantly, they *sounded* dangerous. And I loved it! Steven Tyler's voice slinked out of my speakers, singing about things I couldn't quite fathom at age 10. I was sharp enough to know that those things *sounded dirty*, and that my parents probably wouldn't have chosen to expose me to them at that age. I felt like I was getting away with something!

Steven Tyler's voice, too, was unlike anything I'd heard before. As I mentioned, my parents' music was *very White*, and never blues-based. Of course, I didn't connect the dots at age 10, but Tyler — *the King of innuendo lyrics* — with that gravel and street jive in his voice, sounded far more Black than White. He was also being *sexual!* I didn't get that either at age 10.

Further — *the guitars!* My god, that album is full of loud, bluesy, dirty, nasty, *wonderful* guitar riffs! Played with an attitude that I also hadn't heard before. My music world consisted of Elton's piano, and Paul Simon's acoustic guitar. Sure, Queen certainly had Brian May's magnificent guitar work (which I love to this day). But compared to Aerosmith, Brian's playing was still so neat, clean, *white, and polite*. Aerosmith's guitars were raunchy and sexual.

Get Your Wings started me down the path toward becoming *Dino Dave*, later. It planted the seeds of heavier music in me. The love of loud, heavy, electric guitars. That seed would bloom much later. At the time, I never dreamed I'd end up playing guitar.

Pass the Dutchie (Yes, another Musical Youth joke)

At age 11, while I was busy playing little league baseball, and wearing out *Get Your Wings*, my musical journey was briefly sidetracked. One day, my father came home from work and told us he was going on a sabbatical, and that we were all moving to Europe for six months. My parents were going to yank me out of school, away from my friends, and away from my little league team (that would ultimately win the championship without me). We would rent out our house while we were away so it wouldn't sit empty. A sensible idea, in theory.

So off we went to the Netherlands (aka Holland). To live in an unpronounceable, beach-town suburb of The Hague. I dropped off my albums with my cousin to look after them while I was gone. That turned out to be a good idea. The idiots my parents rented the house to had kids who made it their mission to destroy everything I owned.

In the US, it was 1975. But Holland in 1975 was a culture shock. In the Dutch town we lived in, it was more like 1940. My father commented it felt much like the Brooklyn neighborhood he grew up in (sans greasers). There were no supermarkets. You got your meat from the butcher. Your produce from the green grocer. Your bread from the bakery. Picture the street scene in *The Godfather*, just before Vito gets gunned down. Now picture it in Dutch.

There were many American foods you could not get in Europe in 1975. Like pizza. You couldn't get decent pizza anywhere in Europe. Not even Italy. Like corn on the cob. The corn went to Holland's billions of cows.

Rather than enrolling me in a Dutch school where I might have learned — *if nothing else, Dutch* — my parents chose to homeschool me. My US school sent us away with a full curriculum. It mostly consisted of reading books and writing book reports.

I was stuck home with my mother all day, every day. I made no friends. My parents would drive us all over Europe on weekends. That was somewhat interesting. But the rest of the time, I was bored shitless trying to occupy myself.

I developed a lifelong fascination with WWII, aviation, fighter aircraft, and fighter pilots. I'd been building plastic models long before this trip, so I spent my spare time doing that. I'd built many model ships and planes before our time in Europe. Little did I know that at that very moment, the asshole kids living at our house were destroying them! Do I still sound angry?

I had *almost* nothing for a musical outlet in Europe. We didn't have a radio, much less a record player. We had a black and white TV. The Netherlands, in 1975 had exactly *two* TV channels (creatively named *Nederland 1* and *Nederland 2*). Of course almost 50 years later, it's a lot different. They've come a long way since then. I think they have three channels now.

TV Broadcasts started every night at 6pm. Just test patterns during the day on weekdays. I think broadcasting ended at midnight. The *only* saving grace of it for us — who didn't speak more than a couple of essential words of Dutch — was that Holland got a lot of BBC programming. Rather than dubbing it into Dutch, they broadcasted it in English, with Dutch subtitles.

So we got Monty Python. We got an obscure Brit comedy show called The Goodies. We got Dr. Who, and Masterpiece Theater. We got some BBC news. On weekend afternoons, we also got some kind of Dutch Top-40 music show, running down the Dutch pop charts. Kind of like Britain's *Top of the Pops*.

What I remember most was that Rod Stewart had a huge hit — at least in Europe — with the song *Sailing*. It seemed to stay at Number 1 on the European charts for the entire time we lived in Holland. Years before MTV, there was a promotional video for *Sailing*, that they would play every week. My mom couldn't stand Rod Stewart's gravelly voice. The only other song I remember from that time was the pre-*Saturday Night Fever* Bee Gees, doing *Jive Talkin'*.

When I was a kid in Europe, music couldn't be a big part of my life. Given all that was happening in Rock in 1975, that feels almost criminal now. I still paid attention to music when I found it. But at age 11, with no radio, no record player, and just a once-a-week music show, I was too young and unequipped to find music.

Our European sabbatical was only six months, but seemed like forever to me at the time. I was desperately homesick to get back to my friends, my broken models, and my life in the US.

Shattered

As I entered my teens, music became a bigger part of my life. Between the ages of 12 and 14, I listened to the Beach Boys a lot. I'd listen in my room, dreaming — from snowy Boston — about sunny LA. *The girls on the beach* who — by Beach Boy accounts — *were all within reach, if you know what to do*. Sadly, I so did *not* know what to do! Thus the girls remained *far* out of reach. That said, I really enjoyed the Beach Boys' pop genius, and their incredible vocal harmonies. They also became part of my melodic sense as a musician.

The nuclear bomb — the thing that literally changed *everything* for me musically, were the Rolling Stones. I don't recall the exact moment that bomb went off — certainly the Stones predated me. But we collided when I turned 14 and the Stones dropped their *Some Girls* album.

My parents were not thrilled about *Some Girls*. They'd heard that the title track's lyrics stated *black girls just want to get fucked all night*. Whether that was true or not, it gave them pause for concern. But for all of my parents' squareness, to their credit, they *weren't* Tipper fucking Gore. They never censored what I listened to. Even when they didn't like or approve of it.

About the same time as *Some Girls*, I also got the Stones' double album called *Hot Rocks 1964-71* — a Stones greatest hits album. I became totally *obsessed* with the Rolling Stones. I read books on them. Posters of Farrah, and other babes came off my walls, replaced by posters of Mick, Keith, and the Stones. Babes were all well and good, but the Stones became *my religion*. I made it my mission to buy *all* of their albums. No small task! I succeeded.

You're My Best Friend

My best friend in Jr. High school was Steve. From 7th grade on, Steve and I were inseparable for the next few years. We shared the obsession with the Stones. By the time I was 15 — *for the first time*, my mind started to think about what it would be like to *play music*. To be in a band and pursue Rock music as a career.

While that idea percolated, the event that finally tipped the scale from *maybe I should play music* to *I have to play Rock music* was The Who's 1979 movie *The Kids are Alright*. I'd been aware of The Who for a bit. All the British Invasions bands fascinated me. I'd been a Beatles fan since I could walk, I'd become a Stones *fanatic*, and, of late, I'd been getting into the Kinks. The Who were the next obvious thing.

Steve and I went to see *The Kids are Alright*, and it was truly a life-changer for me. The Who had so *much* fucking charisma! I was hooked. Their songs were great. Their sound was *enormous*! Pete Townshend made *playing guitar in front of screaming loud amp stacks seem like the most fun you could have with your pants on*. He was right. *I wanted in*. I wanted *that!* I finally knew I *had* to play Rock music in a band! And *I had to start now!*

Problem 1. *I don't know how to play*. Listening to the Stones, and now The Who suggested it might take considerable time to get good enough to play in a band. Problem 2. I have no instrument, nor amp to play through. Well, shit.

As the months ticked away, I considered these hurdles. At some point, it occurred to me that playing bass would help me reach my goal of being in a band faster than playing guitar. My reasoning was twofold. First, the demand was higher for bassists. For every bassist, there were at least 10 guitarists. More bands were looking for bassists than guitarists.

Second, was the sheer mechanics of bass, with four strings instead of six. No chords to learn, and no lead work expected of you. It *had* to be faster to become competent on bass. And sure, the Stones' Bill Wyman was a fairly simplistic, and rudimentary (though excellent) bassist, The Who's John Entwistle was a bass virtuoso — the opposite of Wyman. That looked more like what I wanted. I decided to pursue bass guitar.

Back to problems 1 and 2. I told my parents I wanted to learn to play bass. They'd watched my burgeoning obsession with Rock Music with an eye I could only call *cautiously petrified*. Throughout their lives, my parents were always supportive of me, and anything I wanted to do. *Except for Rock music!* The last thing in the world they wanted was for their son to become a Rock musician.

I was not dissuaded. Pursuing my path required gear! The same parents who'd paid for my piano lessons when I was four, refused to financially help me acquire a bass guitar and an amp. I was annoyed, but I knew that when I turned 16, I could get a job and eventually buy them myself. In the meantime, I itched to get started!

Steve had an old, cheap acoustic lying around his house. He offered to lend me the guitar, and somehow my mother figured I should take lessons with that guitar. Oddly, my parents were willing to pay for my lessons, but not help with the gear. So off we went to the local Wurlitzer organ store in the mall. They mostly sold parlor organs and pianos, but behind the cash register, they had a few electric guitars and basses on the wall. There was a dude working there who was some kind of music teacher.

Mom explained to the dude that I wanted to learn how to play bass, but I didn't have a bass yet. So rather than just showing me how to play bass on the acoustic guitar, he set about teaching me how to sight read things like *Mary Had a Little Lamb* from a music book.

Rubes that we were, we bit. I let this clown take my Mother's money for about six months, knowing full-well this was as far away from what I wanted as I could get. Nobody in Rock was reading from sheet music on stage. Just like piano lessons when I was four, I hated it. I was absolutely no closer to playing Rock, or owning a bass guitar.

My mother would nag me to practice. *Practice what you learned before your next lesson*. I resisted. I didn't want to practice the bullshit stuff I was being taught. And like the piano lessons, I quit these lessons, too. But I never gave up the idea of playing.

When I finally turned 16, I got my first job as a dishwasher at Howard Johnson's for the 1980 minimum wage of \$3.35 an hour. Soon I'd become a cook for \$3.50 an hour — whoopee!

I'd set my sights on buying a bass guitar. My target was a bass guitar called a Peavey T-40. To my untrained eye, it looked *amazing* with its natural wood finish, two pickups, and lots of very impressive-looking switches and knobs. To my *incredibly* untrained eye, the Fender Precision basses that most bassists seemed to be using looked positively boring by comparison.

In those pre-internet days, the bible for finding anything used from cars and boats to music gear, was a magazine called *The Want Advertiser*. Soon I'd located a used Peavey T-40 in excellent condition, complete with a hardshell case, for \$250. Even then, that wasn't a lot of money. So after only a few months at HoJo's, I finally had a bass guitar!

I look back on that bass (long since sold) now and laugh. The body was a 2-inch thick slab of maple with a maple neck. It was built like a tank. It sounded good, once I got an amp, but it was massive. It weighed somewhere between a neutron star and a black hole. But at 16, my back was young, strong, and I didn't care. I loved it! Now I just needed to learn how to *play* it. Because absolutely nothing the last teacher had showed me translated to bass.

I Wanna Rock!

I needed a bass teacher. I sure wasn't going back to the music store clown. My mother, *leary as she was*, found an ad in our town newspaper for someone teaching guitar. She showed me the ad. I noted that nothing in the ad mentioned *bass* — just guitar. So I was dubious. My mother called the guy. His name was Robert. She said, "My son wants to learn to play bass. Can you teach him that?" She explained the prior situation of trying to learn bass on an acoustic guitar. Robert said, "Why didn't the teacher just remove the top two strings from the acoustic guitar, and teach him bass like that?" Duh. *Why, indeed?* Score one point for Robert, immediately. I agreed to go meet Robert.

Along with my bass, he told me to bring two cassette tapes with me. One with any song I wanted to learn, and another, for him to record the lesson on. Wow. Brilliant! No sight reading children's songs from music books. Two points for Robert, and I hadn't even met him yet.

I didn't have my license yet, so my mother drove me to Robert's house. We rang the doorbell and Robert answered the door. He had long black curly hair down past his shoulders, and was wearing a Gibson doubleneck guitar around his neck. *He looked like Jimmy Page!* My heart soared as quickly as my mother's probably sank — seeing this longhaired muso. I knew *instantly* that *this* was the guy who'd teach me what I wanted to learn!

Robert was 25. He had been playing guitar since he was 17, and teaching guitar for a few years as well. He was an *amazing* guitarist. He'd been playing in local bands around New England, trying to make his career in music. He was already walking the path I wanted to walk.



Robert, mid 70s, Paradise Rock Club, Boston

We got along great from the first lesson. Robert was wise enough to know that after my experience with the other teacher, I really didn't want to learn music theory from the ground up. *I just wanted to play*, and as quickly as possible. I produced the two cassettes he'd asked me to bring. The song I wanted to learn was *Jumpin' Jack Flash*, by the Stones.

Robert's approach to teaching me was to take the songs I brought to him — pick out the bass lines *by ear*. He'd show me how to play them, and record the lesson on the cassette, so I could refer back to it later. Along the way, he would point out any musical lessons a specific song contained. For example, he'd say, "*This song uses this scale. Here's a diagram of the scale. Learn this as well.*" This was Robert's clever way of slipping in the actual music knowledge I *needed* to know, while still focusing primarily on what I *wanted* to know.

By the end of my first hour lesson, I was making my way through *Jumpin Jack Flash*. It made sense to me. I could do it! I took the cassette lesson home, and dug into it further. By my next lesson with Robert, a week later, I had it down.

For my second lesson, I brought him *My Generation*, by The Who. I was dying to learn to play the bass solo in that song. That was more challenging, but Robert showed me that, too. Again, I went home, practiced, and got it down for the next lesson.

Once we found Robert, my parents never again had to *ask me* to practice. I practiced all the time. And since I was finally learning how to play *what I wanted to play*, learning the little bits of theory on the side didn't bother me at all. I was interested in that side of things, too. Not enough to dive headlong into theory, but enough to learn to get by.

Though this was 1980, my musical tastes ran toward the classic Rock bands of the 70s. Cream, Hendrix, Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple. Cream, in particular, was a huge favorite because I was inspired by Jack Bruce's incredible, almost *lead* bass playing.

I brought all of this music to Robert to dissect and explain to me. Each of these bands' bassists taught me something that became part of my toolbox. From Jack Bruce, I learned speed, and how to improvise. From Zep's John Paul Jones, I learned how to lay a solid, bass foundation while being melodically interesting. And so on.

After about six months of lessons with Robert, it was apparent to both of us that I didn't need him to teach me songs anymore. I was doing it myself, by ear, just as he'd been doing. I no longer needed lessons to achieve my goal. I was ready to play in a band!

By then, my relationship with Robert had already become so much more than just teacher-student. We'd become friends. We bonded over bands we both loved, and life. He'd sneak me — underage — into clubs as his roadie so I could see him play his local gigs. He'd also make me carry his heavy amp cabs so he didn't have to.

Robert became my mentor for *all things musical*. He guided me through what kind of gear to buy, and which things to avoid. Later, when I switched from bass to guitar, he taught me everything I know about guitar, gear, and tone, and a lot more. He kept me from making a lot of mistakes.

2. Gimme Shelter

Are you ready, Steve?

While I was learning how to play from Robert, I was still hanging out with my best friend, Steve. Both every day at school, and most evenings, too. We'd put on Rock records, marvel at our Rock gods, and talk about cute girls in school. Typical high school stuff. We also began drinking around age 16. Mostly beer, and covertly at first. That also became part of life in our small circle of — what my parents called, "degenerate friends." In retrospect, my parents were mostly right about that one.

Music was a huge part of our friendship and our lives. Steve saw the fun I was having learning bass. When I suggested that he take up guitar so we could form a band, he didn't need much convincing. Steve saved up some money and got a brand new Les Paul Custom (\$800 in those days) and an amp. I sent Steve off to take lessons with Robert, and he, too, progressed pretty quickly.

In theory, we now had guitar and bass covered. We needed drums, vocals, and probably a second guitarist. We had no idea where to find them. They weren't at our high school. The ones that were, were already in their own bands.

Steve and I jammed a lot just the two of us. Working on Stones, Cream, and Zep tunes. Steve was getting to where he could play the songs rhythmically. Unfortunately, his lead playing reflected that he'd only been playing a few months. Worse, he didn't have a natural musical ear.

That's something most beginners have to overcome. When beginners bend a guitar string (a big part of lead guitar), they are often sharp or flat on their bends because unless they were born with a good, musical ear (which I was), they can't hear that they're off. It's something that players either develop over time, or they give up. Steve didn't have it yet.

We carried on anyway. I found a guy in school who played acoustic guitar pretty well. He could sing and play folk songs by himself. I enlisted him. Never mind that what he did didn't fit what we were looking for at all.

I'd also become friends with this gorgeous girl who was a grade ahead of me in school. I had a hell of a crush on her, but I was stuck in *the friend zone*. She had sort of a husky, sexy speaking voice, so I asked her if she could sing. Figuring if she was even just so-so, she'd at least *look hot* fronting the band. She said she'd give it a go.

All of these early attempts were just false starts. This period culminated in us suckering the local elementary school into letting us play in their auditorium for the kiddies. All we really wanted to do was turn our amps up to 10, blast their ears off, and get our feet wet on stage in front of an audience. We still had no drummer. Didn't matter. We cranked up and played. Little kids were running up to the stage with notes asking us to turn down. We didn't. We were awful. And I knew it.

But we also learned some things I already suspected. First, we needed a drummer — *badly*. Second, the girl I asked to sing had stage fright — even in front of a K-6 crowd. That day was the end of her music career. Third, the acoustic player, good as he was alone, didn't fit the band at all. The only positive thing we learned was that Steve and I had no stage fright issues. We both enjoyed being on stage. At least there, we were going to be fine.

Back to the Want Advertiser! Where you could not only find cars, boats, and used gear, but other musicians as well. We advertised for a drummer, age 17 to 20, well versed in the Stones, The Who, Zeppelin, Cream, and Hendrix.

The first guy we auditioned was our age, and lived in our town. We'd never crossed paths in school because he went to a private school. He was very into Rush — which at the time, we were not. That would change soon, but at that moment, we didn't know any Rush songs. Steve wouldn't have been able to play them anyway. So we jammed. And while this guy loved Rush, a budding Neil Peart, he was not. He was also really strange. As this was my very first experience with a drummer, I'd not yet learned that they're all nuts. Next!

The next person who answered our ad was a kid named Jonathan. I spoke to Jon on the phone, and he told me he was the Massachusetts, all-state jazz drummer in his age group. I didn't know much about jazz, but I knew it was tougher to play than Rock. This kid could probably *really play*. I told him the kind of music we wanted to play, and he was very interested.

Then he dropped the bomb on us. He was only 15. Which meant he didn't have his driver's license yet, much less a car. And he lived a half hour away. But I had a good feeling about him. So Steve and I threw our guitars and amps in my 76 Dodge Dart, along with a cooler of beer in the trunk, and set off for Jon's house.

We rang the doorbell, in Jon's upscale neighborhood, and immediately heard what sounded like a *very large dog*, barking like it wanted to rip our nuts off. Jon answered the door and told the dog — a beautiful German shepherd named Missy, "it's OK,

Missy." Missy went from guarding the perimeter — the job of all German Shepherds — to *at ease*. Once assured *our papuhs ver in order*, Missy turned into a sweetheart, and a love-bug. I became very fond of her.

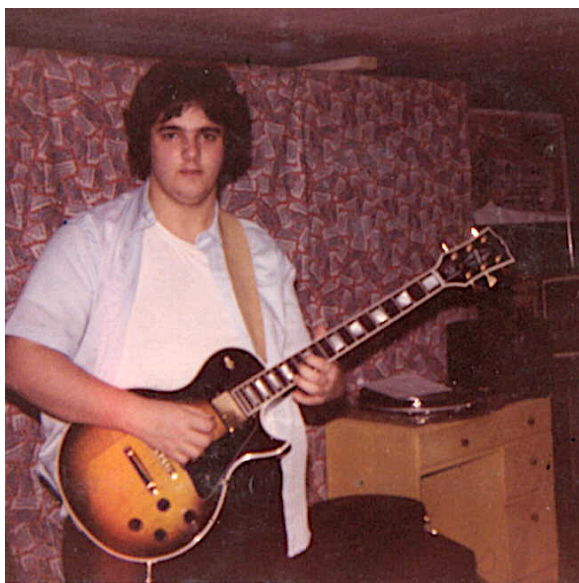
Jon's parents were away, but his cool, older brother was home. This proved beneficial later. We went to their finished basement where Jon's drums lived. We busted out our guitars and amps, and went at it. Boy could this kid *play!* He was fantastic. And more importantly, this was the very first time we sounded like *anything*. Suddenly, everything clicked. We had drums! We had the foundation. We started sounding like something *resembling* a band!



Dino Dave, age 17



Jonathan age 15



Steve, age 17

This was going to work! We all knew it. Since Jon's parents were away, and his older brother was cool, we busted out the beers, and proceeded to go from *giddy* to *shiddy*. Three underage kids drinking too much beer. Laughing our asses off, having the time of our lives.



Lost somewhere in the drunken fog of that day was that we had dinner together at the local mall. I shudder to think how we drove there, back to Jon's house, and eventually home. But we had our drummer.

The logistics were still an issue as Jon lived a half hour away, and couldn't drive. We also couldn't really practice at his house. We still needed a singer, and a guitarist further along than Steve. We needed a *lead* guitarist.

These go to eleven!

When you start playing Rock music, you initially don't know what gear you need — much less what kind of gear creates the sounds you want. Robert was our Sherpa. Steve and I already had decent instruments. We were far more ignorant about the kind of amps to use to get the sonics of Cream, the Who and Led Zeppelin.

My first amp was a 50-watt Sunn bass combo with one 15 inch speaker. Steve had purchased a 50-watt Ampeg combo with two 12 inch speakers. This was fine for Rolling Stones songs. But we increasingly sought heavier, more distorted sounds. To get the thunderous roar of Cream, The Who, and Zeppelin, (hereafter referred to as *the sound*), Robert said we needed Marshall amps and cabs.

Apologies to any non-musos/gearheads reading this, but back then, there were basically two types of amps. What *the pros* used: Large, 50 or 100-watt amplifier *heads* (amps without speaker cabs), that, when paired with a (separately purchased) cabinet containing four 12-inch speakers (called a 4x12 cab) produced *the sound*. *Everything else* — like small combo amps we initially had — simply did *not* produce *the sound*.

We're spoiled now because these days, we have a zillion ways to get great live or recorded sounds. But in 1981, as green, 17 year-olds, having this experience-born, *sacred knowledge* passed down to us *from on high*, by an elder, was a big deal.

Those days, most teens our age used the small combo amps. These were fine for practice, and you *could* gig with them. But without guidance, it would take those kids years to figure that those amps would *never create the sound*. We had Robert, so we skipped that line. By the time we eventually giggered, we *had the sound*. The other kids in our area didn't. It was a big differentiator.

Back then, a Marshall amp head (or 4x12 cab) went for roughly \$400 used (in the Want Advertiser, again). Steve was working at the local convenience store and socking away money. Soon he had a glorious, full Marshall stack. And *hell yeah*, it gave him *the sound!*

All well and good for Steve, on guitar. At this time, I was in my *Jack Bruce is God* phase. So I bought a 1962 Gibson EBO bass. This SG-shaped bass was very close to the EB-3 bass Jack Bruce used in Cream. I loved it. It had a shorter scale than a Fender, and was very lightweight. I could really get around on it.

But to get the sounds Jack had gotten in Cream, live, I needed a Marshall, too. I purchased a 1971, 100-watt Marshall Superlead head for \$400. Robert sold me a Marshall "model 1984 Tall" bathtub cab with four, 15-inch speakers. It was the same width as a Marshall 4x12 guitar cab, but 14 inches taller. It was *huge!* I'd later find out these cabs were super rare. Marshall only made them in 1970/71. They were so rare that people didn't know what they were worth, so they were undervalued. It only cost me \$250.



Dino Dave with T-40 bass and Marshall head & cab

In those days, you had to crank those Marshall amps up to get them to distort, and when you did, they were unbearably loud. Many people modded them with attenuators so you could get the distorted sound at a lesser overall volume. Steve and I both had Marshalls with aftermarket attenuators installed. We were able to dial back the volume to reasonable levels. I don't remember us doing that much.

We didn't have no dope or LSD, but a couple 'a quarts of beer, would fix it so the intonation would not offend yer ear

Our band — called *Shelter*, now had a good drummer, and ear splitting guitar amps that gave us *the sound* we needed. We still needed the singer and second guitar to round out the band.

Jon offered up an idea. He had been dating a girl in his school. We'll call her N. He suggested, "N could sing a bit." About the same time, Robert knew we were looking for a lead guitarist in our age group, so he suggested another of his students named Johnny.

We ended up with both of them. Johnny was a bit further along than Steve, and he could take a guitar solo without sounding like too much of a train wreck.

N provided my first brush with what Frank Zappa later called “rock 'n roll *sleazery*.” N was Jonathan’s girlfriend. *Or was she?* She certainly *had been* his girlfriend at one time. Whether she was still his girlfriend when she entered the band seemed to be a matter of debate — and Jon was losing the debate.

N was 16 years old. She had a cute face, and a popsicle-stick body. It turned out that N had done some musical theater in school. No one was going to confuse her with Ann Wilson or Pat Benetar, but she *could* sing, and she didn't have stage fright. At her first rehearsal, she was able to get through enough of our Rock covers that we saw it would work out. We told N she was in.

After rehearsal, we started unwinding — like we always did — shooting the shit. There was a couch and a few chairs. I sat down on the couch. N came over, sat down next to me and threw her legs over mine — *she all but sat in my lap*. She batted her eyelashes at me. Oy.

I cannot adequately express just how *incredibly horny* I was at 17. Let's just say that if you charted the *horniest men on the planet*, I would have been in the top 5. Maybe the top 3. I mean, *there was the Saturn V rocket, the Washington monument*, then me. I was also quite hopeless with girls. It was a lousy mix.

But damn! Even as clueless as I was with girls, this was a *clear-as-day* signal that even a clueless dolt like me could read. *The coach was waving me in. The tower had given me clearance to land! And I wanted to land! Badly!*

So what if N was a popsicle stick? She was cute enough! And for fuck's sake, *she was willing!* To that point in my life, *no one else had been*. I could have split her like a log — *or at least a popsicle stick* — then and there. Unfortunately, my parents had installed a moral compass in me. Much like power windows in cars back then, a moral compass wasn't *standard equipment* on musicians. Still isn't.

I looked over at Jonathan — my *new friend*, this great, *hard-to-find* drummer. I saw him glaring at N — *his former girl* — who was humiliating him by being all over me — right in front of him. I saw the rage and pain in his eyes, and I knew I had to make a choice. *The band, and my friend, or my dick*. Much to my dick's everlasting dismay, I chose the band and my friend. I rejected N's advances. I knew it was the right thing to do, but I really hated passing up that opportunity.

Worse, when I rejected N — *for the good of the band* — she quickly (though not the same night) turned her attention to the new guitarist, Johnny. Johnny, the *standard musician*, had no qualms or moral issues about plundering a bandmate's girl.

I'd given up the sure thing for the good of the band. Because Johnny didn't give a shit about the band, N finally got screwed — which was apparently all she wanted. Johnny got screwed. I got screwed *by not getting screwed*, and of course, the band *got totally fucked* by all of the ensuing drama.

If I'd *known* the band was gonna get fucked anyway, I felt — briefly — that I should have just gone for it! But that was my dick talking. As much as I wanted it, it really wasn't in me to do that to a friend. So for the first time in my short musical career, though certainly not the last, *drama ensued*.

It didn't help that either Steve or I had to drive Jonathan *and* N home together from rehearsals. There were several tense rehearsals and car rides around this time. But fewer than you'd imagine. Somehow, and for reasons I neither recall, nor understand, Jonathan got over his hurt in a matter of a few weeks. He and Johnny never spoke unless they had to. In Jonathan's shoes, I probably wouldn't have fared as well as he did. The band carried on.



N, Age 16. Dave, Johnny (17), and his incessant, shit-eating grin.

Bring me four fried chickens and a Coke

Another addition to the lineup this time was a friend of Steve's and mine named Jeff. Picture *Animal House* John Belushi, without the singing talent of *Blues Brothers* John Belushi. The best we could say about Jeff is that *he was a character*, and frequently hilarious. If we'd been *Seinfeld*, he'd have been Kramer.

We figured that adding Jeff as a *co-lead vocalist* would add *something* positive to the band. And it did. *Humor*. Jeff was a very funny guy. He once cracked me up at an incredibly inopportune time. My earliest childhood friend, who'd grown up across the street from me, had died in a car accident at age 18. I was truly heartbroken about it.

My parents were out of town, so Jeff — who also knew the deceased, agreed to go to the funeral with me. We're standing there in the middle of the service, I'm trying to keep it together, and Jeff gestures to the woman in front of us, and says, "Those are the ugliest shoes I've ever seen in my life." It was my Mary Tyler Moore *Chuckles The Clown* moment. I started biting my tongue — then my hand — anything to silence my laughter. Eventually I had to excuse myself to keep from losing it. That was Jeff.

Not surprisingly, though, we learned that while Jeff could yell quite loudly, he couldn't sing worth a damn. But Jeff was hardly the first lead vocalist who couldn't sing. Lou Reed made a career out of it. So why not Jeff?

While Jeff kept us laughing behind the scenes, his finest moment as our singer came when we'd do the Hendrix version of the Troggs' *Wild Thing*. Instead of singing, *Wild thing, you make my heart sing*, Jeff shouted, more like Sam Kinison might have. He changed the lyrics to: *Wild thing, you make my cock sting*. Jeff wasn't musical, but he *was* something to behold.



Jeff, age 18, eating, and pretending to play a guitar (he couldn't).

With Jeff on board, we now had my high school band's final lineup: N and Jeff on vocals, Steve and Johnny on guitars, me on bass, and Jonathan on drums.

I learned from this first band experience that it's *very hard to put a band together*, and it's *even harder to keep it together*. By age 18, I was fully aware of that knowledge. That made my doing it over, and over, and over through the years seem even more masochistic.

With the lineup stabilized, we rehearsed a few times a week, for what seemed like forever. Still driving both N and Jon to and from rehearsals. Eventually, we started sounding pretty good for our age. Steve was lousy on lead, but rarely screwed up rhythmically. Johnny was better than Steve on lead, but far from good. N could sing — in that *high school theater girl* kind of way. Jeff could shout his way through *Wild Thing* and *Purple Haze*. But the strength of the band — and the reason we sounded even remotely listenable — was Jonathan's excellent drumming, and my bass playing.

A band — *any band* — is *only* as good as its drummer. Period! I'd learn this lesson over and over throughout the years. Jon was excellent beyond his years. On bass, I was musically *leagues* ahead of our guitarists in terms of musical ear, and frankly, talent. Our rhythm section carried us.

Our first gig with this lineup played at our town's local Recreation center on Feb, 12, 1982. Our setlist was:

Jumpin' Jack Flash - Rolling Stones
My Generation - The Who

Badge - Cream
White Room - Cream
Brown Sugar - Rolling Stones
Big Balls - AC/DC
D'Yer M'aker - Led Zeppelin
Gimme Shelter - Rolling Stones
Toad - Cream
Little T&A - Rolling Stones
Sympathy for the Devil - Rolling Stones
Train Kept a Rollin - Yardbirds
Star Star - Rolling Stones
Dazed and Confused - Led Zeppelin
Sunshine of Your Love - Cream
Wild Thing - Troggs/Hendrix



L-R: Robert (behind amps) Dino Dave, Jeff, Steve



Dave, Steve, N, Johnny

The next gig was the proverbial *High School Battle of the Bands!* Because at that age, of *course it was that*. To qualify to play, we had to play a short audition set. It was low key — much like rehearsing. We killed that, and got in. The actual show was in the school auditorium just after Steve and I graduated. It went off without a hitch. We were well rehearsed, played very loud through our roaring Marshalls, and to the best of our limited abilities. It wasn't like the other high school bands were any better. They weren't. But like all of these douchey, competition gigs where judges are involved, *we lost. We was robbed!* Wouldn't be the last time. Regardless, the *Battle of the Bands* gig was the highpoint of my first chapter as a Rock musician. Then the band folded.



Shelter finale: N, Dave, Steve, Jonathan, Johnny



Dave, Jonathan, Jeff, Steve



Dino Dave, several beers and a bag of Ruffles in. Note the two PA cabs and blue roadcase. They're in the story later.

3. Wasted Years

What do you want to do with your life?

So I'd graduated from high school, but to tell this part of the story, I should back track a bit. As I mentioned, I lived in an upscale, white-collar suburb of Boston. My parents built a house and settled there when I was four years old. They chose the town primarily because the school system had an excellent reputation for education. It also excelled anti-semitism and bullying, but that wasn't mentioned in the town brochure. In pre-social media days, bullying was done *fists* rather than text. And you never heard of anyone killing themselves over bullying. You either took your beatings, or you fought back till it stopped. I did a bit of both. But I digress.

Anyway, people who went to school in my town were *expected* to go to college after graduation. If you didn't have the brains, you went to trade school. I'd been branded *Advance Placement* as far back as 1st grade. The schools told my parents every year, "Dave would get *straight As* if he'd *just apply himself*." That was true for any subject I was interested in. But by high school, I wasn't interested in anything but playing music.

I didn't apply myself. I *underachieved*. I avoided my homework whenever possible. I skimmed by as a C+/B- student. I never cracked a book open to study for the SATs, so my scores were underwhelming (mid 400s I think). I just wanted to play. I got thrown out of 12th grade Physics class for playing air guitar on a yardstick in the back of the classroom. The last thing I wanted after high school was *more school*.

In my Junior year, the high school hired a new guidance counselor, Ms. Levine. I doubt she was even 25. She was a drop-dead gorgeous brunette with a movie star face and a porn star body. She wore extremely tight fitting skirts and blouses. The guys in school quickly re-christened her *Ms. Divine*.

Seemingly overnight, the entire male student population — including yours truly — developed *issues* that required immediate counseling! We'd schedule appointments with Ms. Devine, sit in her office, shine her on about this or that problem, all while fantasizing about being *taught a lesson*.

After a few sessions with Ms. Divine, in my senior year, we eventually got around to talking about my future. I told her the same thing I'd told my parents many times. *I did not want to go to college. I wanted to pursue a career in music.*

Well, *that*, it seemed, *just wouldn't do at all!* She brought in my parents, who agreed with her. Never mind what I wanted. I was *going to college*. It was *expected* of me. I'd been such a mediocre student, that I didn't think I had the grades or the SAT scores. No one else seemed worried. A couple of teacher recommendation letters would sort that out.

The forces had aligned against me. I'd become an obnoxious, disappointing teenager who hung out with degenerates, stumbled home drunk, and wanted to throw his life and his brains away playing Rock music. My parents and I were at the lowest point in our relationship. I finally decided I'd go to college. Both to get them off my back, and to get out of the house and away from them for a while.

I didn't aim high. I wanted a *party* school. I only applied to one school: The University of Massachusetts, Amherst. And despite my mediocre scholastic record, I somehow got in.

And whadda ya know, so Steve! We arranged to both go to UMASS, and to room together. We planned to take our instruments with us and start a new band at college.

Animal House

UMASS at that time, had the nickname ZOOMass. Steve and I ended up sharing a dorm room on the 6th floor of one of the school's 22-floor towers. Party central! Our dorm was smaller than my bedroom in my parents house.

The towers were a mix of all male, and all female floors because each floor had only one large bathroom containing both toilets and showers. There were about 30 guys on our floor. Unless one needed *quiet*, everyone left their doors open so people could stop by, listen to tunes, and socialize. This gave the floor a very *fraternity-like feel* (ala Delta house), even though it wasn't a true frat.

Each room had two guys in it. Each pair of guys painted the hall-facing side of their door to suit their personality. This was 1982, and the predominant theme was Rock and Metal album art covers. One guy painted an awesome reproduction of Iron Maiden's *Number of the Beast* cover. Steve and I painted our door like the Led Zeppelin II album cover.

The night we freshmen arrived, a party ensued, and the drinking and drugging never stopped for my entire time there. And I don't mean *just mine*. Walking the 6th floor you'd see beer or booze flowing, pot smoke billowing, and god knows what else. One weekend, someone got a pillow-sized bag of mushrooms, and the whole floor went *shrooming*. Except me. I always just stuck to booze. I didn't like pot either.

At that first party, the upperclassmen were bummed. They told us that the liquor stores had just stopped delivering booze to the dorms. Fortunately, I had the Dart on campus. When the guys needed a booze run, the deal was I'd drive them, and they'd buy me a bottle of whatever I wanted. Usually, that was a 1.75L bottle of Cossack vodka. This was a great deal for me because I was still 18, and the drinking age — at least to *buy* booze in Massachusetts, was 20.

So I was finally at college! Just like everyone *except me* had wanted. I was still just as stubbornly motivated to play music. And just as stubbornly *not* motivated to do schoolwork. I received my class schedule. I don't know whose great idea it was to schedule freshman pre-calculus at 8am on Monday mornings. *That*, as MS Divine might have said, *just wouldn't do*. Besides, there was a scheduling conflict. I was already scheduled to be hungover Monday mornings (and many other mornings, too).

As these are my *musical* memoirs, I'm not going to relate the many stories of drunken mayhem that ensued my first year at UMASS. Suffice it to say I majored in *Excessive Drinking*, and playing bass.

Metal Heart

A glance at Shelter's song list showed I was heavily steeped in 70s hard Rock. I'd been so single-minded, and frankly *close-minded* in my tastes, that I was mostly clueless about the burgeoning Heavy Metal scene that was exploding in the early 80s. That changed big-time in college.

Every room on our floor had a full, loud, stereo system (not just boomboxes). And every guy had a full collection of music. This situation led to a lot of friendly volume wars on the floor. Steve eventually brought his full Marshall stack to the dorm room and ran our stereo through the 100 watt Marshall head and eight 12-inch speakers. We won.

More importantly, I was exposed to TONS of new, and mostly Metal music. And I loved it. For the first time, I was exposed to Randy Rhoads with Ozzy, The Michael Schenker Group, Iron Maiden, and even lesser known bands like Vandenburg and Zebra. I loved pretty much all of it.

It's got wires that vibrate, and give music

The most important thing *by far* that happened to me musically during college, was that I finally got into Rush. Heavily.

I'd been exposed to Rush two years prior, when trying out that weird drummer. Back then, I didn't want to know. Now I was ready for Geddy! Dear lord, Geddy Lee's bass work hit me like a ton of bricks. The way Jack Bruce's had earlier. Except where Jack was an improvisational soloist who happened to play bass guitar, Geddy Lee always held down the bottom end of the song. Geddy played *astounding* bass lines, but more often, *drove* the songs with his bass. Early Rush had been Metal, then proggy metal. But they had recently dropped *Permanent Waves* and *Moving Pictures*. These albums moved Rush into a more radio-friendly sound, without losing any of their instrumental prowess.

I became obsessed with Rush and Geddy Lee. Since I rarely attended classes, I spent most afternoons jamming along with Rush songs while watching *Days of Our Lives* and *General Hospital* — with the sound turned down — drooling over the gorgeous women on those shows. Is it just me, or were the soap opera babes much better looking back then? Again, I digress.

Through tape trading on my floor, I acquired all of the Rush albums. I made it my mission to learn all of Geddy Lee's bass lines on all of the albums. I'd put on whichever album and jam through the whole thing. There were a few tougher bass parts that I struggled with (they'd come eventually), but I got to where I could play through most of the Rush bass parts.

In the meantime, Steve and I were having no luck starting a band at UMASS. We put up a note on a bulletin board stating something like *guitar and bass seeks drummer and other musos*. Can you guess the number of students who had a drum kit in their dorm room? I'll give you a hint: you can count the number on one hand, if you cut all the fingers. We managed to arrange two jams with other guys that went nowhere. Oh well, back to learning *Hemispheres*, while drooling over Kristen Alphoso and Jackie Zeman.

The Song Remains the Same

Around this time, another pivotal event occurred. By the time I got to college, Led Zeppelin had surpassed the Rolling Stones as my favorite band. I had all the albums, bootlegs of live performances, posters of them on my walls, and magazines filled with their pictures. But I'd never seen them live. This wasn't only pre internet, and pre MTV. This was pre-VHS video cassette.

When Steve and I heard that the local Amherst movie theater was having midnight showings of the Live Zeppelin movie, *The Song Remains the Same*, it was a no brainer. We went the first night. And the second night. And the third. We went every night for the whole week they were showing it.

It was just so enthralling. I loved all of Zeppelin, but Jimmy Page had an absolutely magical aura about him. If you were young and impressionable, Jimmy was totally *larger than life*. In a time before synthesizers could create a zillion weird sounds, in *The Song Remains the Same*, Jimmy would coax sounds out of a guitar you'd never heard anywhere before. Decked out in that black, dragon suit — or the one with the stars and planets on the legs, he looked like Merlin the Magician. Jimmy wielded his violin bow like a magic wand. So, yeah, we went for five consecutive nights, just to watch Jimmy Page weaving a magic spell with his guitar.

If Pete Townshend in *The Kids are Alright* gave me the original itch to play music, it was Jimmy Page in *The Song Remains the Same* that later made me switch from bass to guitar.

Have you seen Junior's grades?

Two things happen when you spend your days playing bass all day instead of going to classes. The first is that *you get very good on bass*. The second is that you flunk out of college.

My first semester report card was two Ds and two Fs. for a 0.5 GPA. One of the F's (predictably) was freshman pre-cal. I went exactly twice. Once for the mid-term, and once for the final. Who knows what it might have been if they hadn't scheduled that damn class at 8am. I might have gotten a D! Probably not. I'd sucked at algebra, and this was worse.

UMASS put me on probation, but fortunately not double-secret probation. I avoided vomiting on Dean Wormer, but my father sure wasn't happy. He told me to *shape up* and do better in my second semester. Ha! Sure, Dad.



Only known pic of Dino Dave (right) at UMASS, 1983
(No clue why we were wearing suits).

Grail-shaped beacon

On the break between our first and second semesters, Robert contacted Steve. Robert had acquired a rare, 1954 Les Paul Standard guitar. Great Les Pauls didn't come around often — much less so in those days. So Robert told Steve that he really *had* to buy this guitar. The only reason Robert wasn't keeping it for himself was that he already had a black, 1955 Les Paul Custom.

Steve and I went to see the guitar. It was gorgeous. Not *collector-level* gorgeous, but *player-grade* gorgeous. A 54 Les Paul was originally a Gold Top, with single coil P-90 pickups, and a wrap-around, stop tailpiece. This one had been converted into a poor-man's Les Paul Standard. It had been stripped of its gold top and refinished to a now-faded sunburst. It had been rerouted for full humbuckers, and fitted with a tune-o-matic style bridge and tailpiece. In short, it looked *a hell of a lot* like Jimmy Page's Les Paul in *The Song Remains the Same*.

The story was that the guitar had been Brad Whitford's guitar (he of Aerosmith). The story went, Brad had sold it to a friend of Robert's. It both played and sounded like a dream. It was the best sounding guitar we'd ever heard. It was the holy fucking grail!

Fortunately for Steve, the refinish and custom work ruined the guitar's true collectability factor. A 1954 Gold top in original condition would have been a five-figure guitar. But as-is, in 1982, the guitar cost Steve \$800. His 1980 LP Custom had cost that much. \$800 was expensive in those days, but not ridiculous — especially for a vintage, 50s Les Paul. Steve snapped up the guitar up and brought it back to school with us. I drooled over it every time he busted it out of the case.

Same Old Song and Dance

Surprisingly, I did a little better in my second school semester. I also unknowingly picked up a skill that ultimately saved my adulthood. I learned how to *write*. Not music. *Words*.

I had a freshman composition class. The teacher was maybe 23 years old. The beauty of his class was that you almost couldn't fail. He'd let you redo your assignment until you got it right. That is, if you handed in your paper, and got a C-, you could take the teacher's feedback, rewrite it, and turn it in for a hopefully better grade. My other grades were so shitty, I figured that was a good deal.

I'd sit in front of my Smith Corona electric typewriter with its correction tape cartridge nearby (much better than White Out), banging out an essay on topics like why the lyrics of Rush's *Limelight* inspired me. I'd turn it in. The teacher would grade me — typically in the C range. I'd see him during his office hours. He'd explain how to improve my paper, and I'd go off and revise it.

In those pre-word processing days, you literally *cut* your paper copy up with a scissors, then *pasted* (or scotch taped) it back together in the revised order, then retyped the whole thing. It was so damn tedious, I was glad I'd never have to do any more writing after I left college.

I got a B in that writing class. Sadly, it wasn't enough. In my second semester, I flunked out of UMASS.

Bring it on Home

Steve and I, who'd been inseparable since 7th grade, finally had a falling out at school. The truth was we were going in completely different directions. Steve was a good student, and *not* failing out. And he'd become less and less interested in playing guitar.

There were two main issues. Steve had become a pothead. I had not. I had no moral or philosophical objection to pot whatsoever. I might have smoked it myself, but pot almost never got me high. I'm told I have high cannabinoid resistance. Whenever I'd try pot, I coughed so much I didn't find it enjoyable. That, and I hated the smell.

I didn't begrudge Steve smoking pot. But as I seemed to be the only guy on the floor who did *not* smoke pot, I had one simple request. I said, "Steve, since you're doing bong hits with other guys on our floor, *when possible*, can you please do them in their rooms instead of ours." Sometimes he did. But he became less and less concerned with my feelings on this. Many times I'd get back to our room, and Steve and another pothead would be doing bong hits in our room. I complained.

Worse, in the final months of my last semester, our former singer, Jeff, had come to visit us and party for a weekend. He crashed on our floor, and that was fine. But when Jeff went back, he told our other degenerate friends what a great time he'd had, drinking and drugging. So naturally, they all wanted to visit, too.

I told Steve I was against this. I didn't think three more people crashing on the floor of our tiny room was a great idea. But my real concern was our friend Bobby. Bobby was a weightlifter, and strong as an ox. He once picked up the back of Steve's Chevy Chevette with both of us in it. He held it there with the rear wheels spinning. We weren't going anywhere till he put the car down. The problem was, Bobby was a mean, destructive drunk, who loved to fight. And when fought, the people he fought got hurt badly. I thought Bobby getting blind drunk on a floor full of guys he didn't know had *bad idea* written all over it. I told Steve that I could live with the other two showing up, but I was really against Bobby coming. He reluctantly agreed I had a point, and said he'd tell them not to come.

They showed up that weekend. It was bad enough Steve disregarded my wishes, but he'd also sold me out. He told Bobby that *I hadn't wanted him to come*. Great. Bobby was probably pissed at me and about to spend the weekend drunk. I was going to die.

When they arrived, they, including Bobby, weren't openly hostile to me, but any dynamic of friendship we once had, had gone. In their eyes, I'd turned my back on my friends.

There was some truth to that, but at the time, home was one world, and college was another. I didn't want those two worlds colliding.

It was a very tense weekend for me. That night, I successfully cajoled a drunken Bobby out of my bed without him bashing my brains in. Other than that, the weekend went off OK. Bobby didn't kill me or anyone else, and they all left Monday morning.

The damage was done. Steve had flagrantly disregarded my wishes and had put me in a very bad spot. In our divorce, Steve kept the friends. By that time, he was welcome to them.

Later that summer, while I was on a vacation with my family, Steve talked one of my parents' neighbors into giving him the key to my parents house. He went into the basement and retrieved our band's PA gear so he could sell it (seen in the earlier picture). We'd already agreed to sell it, but while Steve had paid for 3/4ths of it, he knew damn well I'd want my quarter share of the money. He knew *I'd get my share* if we sold the gear *from* my parents house. Instead, he broke in, took the gear, sold it, and kept all the money. Probably spent it on weed.

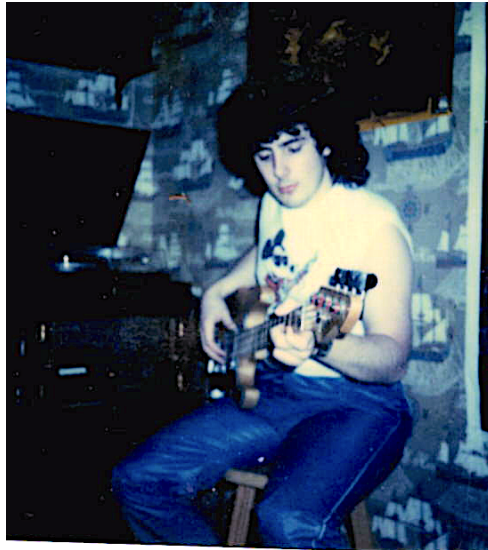
Lesson two in Rock n' Roll sleazery: *When you're in the band, your bandmates will be your closest friends. Your "brothers." The minute the band is over, they will turn on you, and rip you off for whatever they can.* It wouldn't be the last time.

Mama I'm Coming Home

1983. I came home from UMASS with my tail between my legs. A scholastic failure, friendless, and no closer to my dream of being in a successful band.

My parents welcomed me home with open arms. In my one year away, I hadn't changed my priorities about wanting to play music. But I'd matured a lot as a young man. I was no longer constantly at odds with my parents. I felt I understood them more, and they understood me more. My father finally realized that — *at least for the moment* — I just wasn't interested in college. He finally saw that forcing the issue wasn't doing anyone any good.

Dad said, “You can stay here as long as you like, but you can’t just sit around. You have to get a job.” Fair enough. He wasn’t even going to charge me rent. He just wanted me to take some responsibility. Again, fair enough.



Home from UMASS, February, 1984, age 19.

Working Man

So. A job. Ok. That shouldn’t be too hard. I can . . . do *what* exactly? *That people will pay me for.* Hmm. What was my last job? Cook! I can cook! I got on the phone with a few local temp agencies. I was 19, young, strong, *and I could cook.*

I started taking temp jobs. A week here, two weeks there. Lots of different odd jobs. I worked in a lot of kitchens. Mostly in large, office park cafeterias that catered to the white collar lunch crowd. I’d go in the AM, do food prep. At breakfast time, the people would come in and I’d fix them bagels, bacon and eggs, breakfast sandwiches, or whatever. In the lull between breakfast and lunch, we’d switch over to lunch food. Sandwiches, hot meals. I’d serve that at lunch time. Post lunch, we’d clean up and be out by 4pm or so.

I worked in warehouses, driving a forklift. Loading boxes of computers onto pallets, and shipping them out. I was 19, young, strong, and suddenly my back started bothering me. I did the math. All of those individual computer boxes I was lifting added up to lifting about 2500 lbs a day. So that was the end of that. But I made a new friend. The chiropractor.

I worked as a janitor in an office park. That paid pretty well, and wasn't too bad unless something unusual happened. Like the toilets backing up. When I got switched to the night shift, it was a pretty cushy job. Mostly just emptying waste baskets after hours.

For those about to Rock, We Salute You

While I worked at many of these jobs, I listened to the new Metal music that was happening on my Sony Walkman cassette player, and in the Dart. It was the summer of Ozzy's *Bark at the Moon*, and Dio's *Holy Diver*. Every week there seemed to be a new, awesome, guitar hero popping up. It was a musically thrilling time for a kid who loved heavy music.

Metal was king, and all of these bands and players were peaking. I was going to multiple concerts every month, seeing all of these bands and their guitar heroes. Jake E. Lee, Vivian Campbell, George Lynch, Warren DeMartini, and of course there were the stalwarts: Alex Lifeson, Michael Schenker, the guys from Iron Maiden, Judas Priest, and the Scorpions. Leading the pack was always Eddie. He was hardly new, but he was omnipresent and still king of that hill.

Also around this time, Robert turned me on to Gary Moore, who would become one of my favorite players and biggest lead guitar influences when I finally switched to guitar. That idea was still a ways away, but I was thinking that maybe I should get a guitar, just for fun at home. For when I wasn't playing bass.

Unchained

I was home from school, working shitty jobs. Now I needed a new band. Robert was still toiling away in Boston bar bands. I asked him if he knew any available guitar players. He said he might. There was a guy about my age named Steve. Not *that* Steve. From here on, we'll call him Steve2.

Robert and I went down to the Jumbo Lounge in Somerville to see Steve2's band play. Steve2 was a very fit, very good-looking kid with short, blond hair. Picture the good-looking, asshole frat-boy type, with a hot girl on each arm. The guy who enjoyed picking on nerds in movies like *Revenge of the Nerds*.

His band was playing Top-40 pop Rock. Loverboy, The Cars, Journey, etc. They sounded competent playing that music, but they weren't playing anything I wanted to play. I was dubious at best. That said, Steve2 was already playing club gigs, and I wasn't. So he was ahead of me. After Steve2 finished his set, Robert introduced us and we exchanged phone numbers.

A few days later, I called Steve2. He told me he really wasn't into what his band was playing, and that he wanted a change. I asked him what he was into. He said "Rush, Van Halen, Ozzy." I said, "Cool! Can you play that stuff?" He said "yeah." I wasn't quite sure I believed him, but I told him I was into all of that as well, and we agreed to meet.

We met and jammed a bit, just he and I. We played Ozzy's *Crazy Train*, *I Don't Know and Mr. Crowley*. He played Randy's solos, note-perfect. We played Rush's *Tom Sawyer*, *Limelight*, and *Red Barchetta*. He played Alex Lifeson's solos, note-perfect. I was flabbergasted. This 19 year-old kid could play *anything* that the guitar heroes of the days were playing. Soon, I'd see him *pick out guitar solos by ear*, that he'd never played before. *In like 10 minutes*. Steve2 was a fucking phenom. We agreed to work together.

I was thrilled! I'd found a guy who could play all the songs I wanted to play. Now we needed a drummer and a singer. We found Randy, our drummer first. He clicked immediately. He too wanted to play the same stuff. We did some of our rehearsals in my parents' basement. When Randy got a brand new, *expensive* Sonar drum kit, we moved into Randy's parents' basement.

While working on songs, we looked for a singer. Someone who could sing the very high vocal parts that most of these songs required. We finally found Lee. A thin, Asian kid our age who had a very high voice. He could sing all that high, early Rush stuff.

We finally had a lineup of *guys who could play*. No one was a weak link. We started sounding real good.

We were about half *Rush cover band*. What I recall of our songlist was:

Ozzy

Crazy Train
I Don't Know
Mr. Crowley

Led Zeppelin

The Song Remains the Same
The Immigrant Song

Robert Plant

Burning Down One Side
Just Like I've Never been Gone.

Rush

2112
Subdivisions

Tom Sawyer
Freewill
The Trees
Red Barchetta
Limelight
Analog Kid
Digital Man
Black Sabbath
Turn Up the Night
Triumph
Fight the Good Fight

This music required a high degree of musical prowess, and we had it. I started thinking about finally gigging in clubs. But Steve2 always seemed to find reasons why we weren't quite ready yet. I still have our rehearsal cassette tapes somewhere. We were ready.

At this time, my bass rig still consisted of my Gibson EBO bass (my original Peavey T-40 was no longer cool), through my Marshall amp and cab. When I turned it up, it distorted into that *live Jack Bruce in Cream sound*. I loved that sound, but even I had to admit it *wasn't* the sound of 80s Metal bass guitar. So I kept my sound as clean as possible. I didn't think it was a big problem, but Steve2 must have disagreed.

At some point after we moved all of our gear into Randy's basement, I again went out of town for a few days. When I returned, it was clear that Steve2 and Randy had been auditioning other bassists — quite probably through my rig. Apparently they hadn't found a better bassist. But the writing was on the wall. Shortly thereafter, Steve2 left our band. It was a shame that we never gigged because we had been good.

Randy and I tried for a couple of weeks to find a new guitarist, but it was painfully obvious to both of us we were not going to find anyone in the same league as Steve2. Even in 1983, guitarists like him didn't grow on trees — *except in LA*. Back to square one.

Alone Again

I had to rethink everything. Why had this band folded? I looked for answers. The answer (I felt) was that Steve2, good as he was, was finicky, a flake, and a bit of a basket case. It also wasn't lost on me that my bass sound was no longer in style, or what was wanted in bands of that time. I knew I had to fix that issue before I was going to fit in with another band.

Going to Denny's

I kept combing *The Want Advertiser* to see if any suitable Rock band needed a bassist. I answered an ad from a guitarist named Denny. He was trying to put something together. He had a drummer already, so he invited me down to a jam at a rehearsal space a few towns over. Very conscious of my bass sound and not wanting to sound dated, I showed up with my old Sunn 1x15 combo amp from high school (just for the tryout) and my T-40 bass, which, unlike my Gibson, was at least a long scale bass, and sounded more like a Fender.

Denny was an imposing *man* of *at least* 35. He looked like your average Harley Davidson guy. Jeans. Black leather vest. Wallet on a chain. Facial hair. Harley outside. He had a Les Paul Jr. and a good-sounding guitar rig.

By his own admission, Denny was mostly a rhythm player, but he absolutely knew what he was doing. He played like a guy who had *many* more years on his tires than I did. The drummer, Pete, was a powerhouse. He was built like a linebacker, hit hard, and sounded great. Away from his kit, he was soft-spoken and laid back. Pete was 20 — a year older than me.

This was my first time playing original tunes rather than covers. Denny had a handful of songs. He showed them to us. We started playing and the room exploded. And while he didn't play more than a few lead licks, Denny's playing had a *seasoning* and *maturity* that even Steve2 hadn't had. He *sounded* like a guitarist with at least 10 years experience.

Pete and I locked in instantly as a rhythm section. I really enjoyed playing with him, and he seemed to enjoy playing with me. It was obvious we were still going to need a lead guitarist, and a vocalist, but at the end of the evening, Denny admitted that despite our differing ages, we sounded like a promising unit. We all exchanged phone numbers.

Later that week, we did it all over again, and it sounded even better. Denny was talking about bringing in another guitarist he knew, and possibilities of singers. He already had contacts at clubs we could play when we were ready. Things were looking up.

A few days later, I called Denny to find out when we'd next be getting together. The whole thing had evaporated. I don't recall whether he was going back to his prior band, doing something else, or what. But he wasn't moving forward with me or Pete. He thanked me for my time and that was the end of it.

We Sold our Souls for Rock n Roll

Or, at least *I did*. Briefly. Since nothing was *cooking at Denny's*, I thought if I could stomach playing Top 40, I might be able to make some cash playing music. Good Top 40 bands made decent money playing weddings, bar-mitzvahs, and corporate parties. *I certainly had the skill*. Nothing in Top 40 music on bass was as challenging as the stuff I'd already been playing for passion.

It took some time, but I found a working Top 40 band that needed a bassist. They rehearsed an hour away, which sucked, but they claimed *they made money*. They told me to learn Styx's *Too Much Time on My Hands*, and Journey's *Anyway You Want It* for the audition. I thought, *yuck!* But hey, that was Top-40.

I learned both songs quickly. I packed the Dart with my Sunn amp, and the Peavey bass. *As uncool as that bass still was*, I figured it suited Top-40 perfectly. Hell, *it said T-40 right on the headstock*.

They were a competent, if unspectacular Top-40 band with a songlist of more than 60 *ghastly* Top-40 numbers. Sadly, the two songs I'd learned seemed to be the most rocking numbers in the set.

The audition went fine. I played the songs well. It all sounded good. I gravitated to the guitar player. I don't recall his name. *Probably Steve*. He had long hair and played an Explorer, which was a very Rock guitar, for a very Pop band. I suspected he *rocked* more than he let on.

They liked my playing enough to ask me back. I learned a couple more of their songs and returned a few nights later. The next time I played with them, they told me I had the gig. I said, "Great! Can I bring my real rig down, and leave it here for practice?" They said, "sure."

I crammed my Marshall 4x15 cab into the Dart. This cab was 46" tall and 29" wide. Almost half of it stuck out the back, and the trunk had to be bungeed down. In retrospect, bringing that cab into their rehearsal room probably frightened their delicate, pop sensibilities. Perhaps these wussies couldn't envision *the largest cab Marshall ever made* — a cab that looked like it belonged on stage with Deep Purple — on stage with them at a Top-40 wedding gig. *Perhaps you see where this is going?*

We were still a long way from a paying gig, and after three rehearsals, I was already hating playing their song list. During a break, I asked *Probably Steve* if there was any chance we could work some Joe Lynn Turner-era Rainbow into the setlist. Both *Stone*

Cold and *Power* had charted recently. And while no one was going to confuse those songs with *Stargazer*, they were still Ritchie Blackmore — peppier than anything else on the band's song list. And while he himself seemed game, *Probably Steve* said, "*Probably not.*"

I left my cab there, went home and got a call the next day. "Dave, this isn't going to work out." I said, "You couldn't have told me this last night, so I could have taken my cab home with me?" So I had to drive an hour there and back just to get my cab. Thanks guys.

That was my cup of coffee with Top-40. I learned two more important lessons. One, *don't play music you're not into*. It's soul crushing, and you'll learn to *loathe* playing. Plenty of guys love those wedding gigs. More power to them. But it was definitely *not* for me. Two, wait till you're in the band *a while* before leaving any gear behind. Of course, these days, I'd never leave anything behind. Ever.

Sound Chaser

I finally took the plunge and bought an Ampeg V-*something* bass amp that produced a clean, round, bass sound similar to that of its big brother, the SVT. It was the sound of *all bass everywhere* in those days. I kept the Marshall 4x15 cab. That cab was never a sonic problem. Now I had a much more modern, palatable bass sound.

Crank up my Les Paul in your face

Around this same time, I also decided to buy my first electric guitar. A \$150 Ibanez Roadstar. Even in those days, it was a cheap guitar. I already knew how to play basic chords and such. I started fooling around with guitar, picking out songs in my spare time, just for fun. A few months later, I decided I wanted a better guitar, and one with a tremolo. I picked up a *slightly less cheap* Kramer Strat for \$250.

I'd barely owned the Kramer a month when I got a call from Robert. It seemed that Steve¹ had finally gotten out of music completely and had sold the 54 Les Paul back to Robert — again, for \$800. Robert knew I had just started playing guitar and said, "Dave, *you have to buy this guitar.*"

I'd played that guitar *many* times when Steve¹ owned it. It played like butter, sounded magnificent, and had incredible, *vintage mojo*. The *Holy Grail* had returned, and was now within my grasp!

Robert didn't have to ask twice, twist my arm, or convince me in any way. *Of course I was going to fucking buy it!* Robert said "sell your two cheap guitars for whatever you can get for them. You can pay me the rest of the \$800 whenever you get it."

I sold the two cheap guitars as quickly as I could, and paid Robert the remainder shortly thereafter. She was finally mine! As I tell this story, roughly 40 years later, she's sitting about 15 feet away from me, safely in her case.



Dino Dave, *much* later, 2011 with the 1954 Les Paul

Third Bass

Throughout this period of musical wallowing, I was still working crappy jobs. The pay was poor, but because I was still living at home, whatever money I made was pure profit. I decided I should upgrade my bass guitar situation. I'd used the Peavey bass with Denny, and it sounded fine. But in the current era of MTV, where every new guitar hero seemed to be rocking a Superstrat with a cool, custom paint job, my clunky, natural wood finished T-40 was the epitome of *uncool*.

I knew what I wanted for style and features, but it didn't seem like any company was making it off-the-rack. I discussed the idea of building a custom instrument with Robert. He said, the best guitar tech in Boston was Richard Stanley. Richard could build me a

fantastic bass, but it would probably take forever and cost me \$4000. That was out of my league. Robert said there was another guy named Scott in the music store in Boston where Robert taught guitar. Robert figured Scott could do it for a lot less.

We went to see Scott, and indeed, he agreed to build me a custom bass for \$1500, and that I could pay him installments. That was great, because that was a lot of money for me at that time.

I spec'd out the shape of a Rickenbacker bass, but in a smaller, $\frac{3}{4}$ scale size. Instead of a flat, slab body like a Rickenbacker, I wanted a contoured body like a Stratocaster. I gave Scott a Charvel, full scale bass neck I'd bought, and he'd fit the custom body to that neck. He'd finish the whole instrument, including the back of the neck, in gloss black. I wanted EMG pickups and a silver, Schaller bridge and tuners.

Scott told me that the build would take several months. I left a down payment. Nothing to do now but wait.



Custom bass, roughed out, June 1984

The Number of the Beast

Once again, I was back to square one. I had a fantastic new guitar to play in my room, and a fantastic bass on the way, but I had no band. I had no idea what to do. I racked my brain. Who did I know? Who could I call? Then Dave got an idea. A wonderful, *not-so awful* idea!

I grabbed my wallet. In the days before everyone carried mobile phones (as every Seinfeld fan knows from George Costanza) a man's wallet held everything important that a man might need. Cash, driver's license, business cards, notes with important info, receipts, perhaps a sad, wistful, outdated condom, and, most importantly, *phone numbers*.

I rifled through the wallet, taking out everything. I must have had 20 to 30 bits of paper, and post-it notes. Eventually I found it! A scrap of paper with two phone numbers on it. One for Denny, and the one I was really looking for: *the number for Pete*. The easy going, but *beastly* drummer I'd played with when we both auditioned for Denny.

Pete! We had played very well together and really enjoyed each other's playing. Maybe I could start a band with Pete! It was many months later. I had no idea if he was available but, thanks to my trusty wallet filing system, I had Pete's phone number. I called.