



AL-VIS

THE STORY OF JP GOTROCK



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Prologue

Route 287 is one of the busiest roads around any time of day, even at 5:30 AM in the middle of the winter. But the traffic is moving.

So as he winds past the 18 wheelers and garbage trucks and oil tankers in his 1968 Plymouth Valiant his mind starts to wander.

Just a few weeks earlier he had carted all of the wedding presents, the china, the framed prints, the sandwich makers and Tupperware out of the one-bedroom apartment and onto the curb for the trash man. He packed up everything else into his father's car and drove to New Brunswick to live with his keyboard player David until he got settled.

The marriage was a victim of so many different circumstances, but mostly just two people who couldn't seem to be able to live together. And there was the money situation- he just couldn't seem to make any and she couldn't seem to do without it.

The air temperature is close to five below zero, the coldest day of the winter. There is no heat in the car but he doesn't feel any pain from the frost bite setting in. Just numbness.

But numbness is a feeling too. You know the pain is there, but you just don't feel it. You know the tears are there inside of you but you don't feel the need to cry them. Just numbness.

Numbness about the hopes and dreams of the in-laws. The nieces and nephews, sisters and brothers in law who thought you would be a part of the family forever. Numbness about the dreams you had together. Not sadness, not relief as you might have expected, just numbness.

As the car passes the Route 27 exits the traffic lets up just a little and his mind wanders even further. He is looking at a carousel, like the one at the Palace Amusements. He is watching it spin around and around. But instead of painted horses, he sees memories- each one fading in for a few moments then fading out again. Every so often the carousel comes around full circle, and shows the same memory again. The Deckhouse, The Stone Pony, Inn The Saddle, The Court Tavern, a party next to Patrix where the crowd is stomping so hard the floor almost caves in. The Fast Lane, Big Man's West,

and there's the Pony again- Bruce is in the audience. And there's a Rutgers frat party, beer bottles crushed on the floor as far as you can see. And there's the Asbury Rock and Roll Museum, Billy and Ruth! And the Corner Tavern, Dolls Place, and there's the Court Tavern again...

And soon the Watchung Mountains are in view as the car passes the Easton Avenue exit. That is where he is headed, to a little town called Bernardsville, a "Pretty How Town" as Cummings would say. The traffic thins out again, and the road narrows slightly as he passes the Manville and Somerville exits.

The mind continues on its own parallel journey. There is no radio in the car but there is music all around him: Double Shot Of My Baby's Love, In The Midnight Hour, California Sun, Papa's Got a Brand New Bag, Get Off My Cloud, Gonna Rock and Roll Outa Control!!!! Come on Tim, sing it! John, you're dragging the tempo! Hey how are we gonna get this thing up the steps of the Hot Dog House? We'll need 3 people just to lift it!!! And the colored girls all say...

After Route 78 the road narrows again and the climb is very steep. Traffic dies down and he is the only one on the road for a while. The cold air must be stinging but he still doesn't feel it. He is on his way out of one life and into another. He must be sad but he doesn't feel that either and the view-master inside his head keeps on clicking:

Hey Tim, can you practice Sunday? Can't make Saturday afternoon. We got a gig at the Court on Friday so my voice would be iffy anyhow. Where is John, his drums aren't at the Hot Dog House? Hey Vini, can you make the 18th at the Corner Tavern? This guys wants to book us at a party in Piscataway and he wants to see us there first. Neal, where's your bass??? Donnie- how's your voice, can you sing Linda Lou? Hey Dave- please stop arguing with John and start the song!!! Don't worry, we'll be great- anyway its all about the music...

And exit 29 is upon him, Mount Airy Road. As he makes his way down the winding road into town he thinks there might be a tear in his eye but there isn't, and besides, how would he know, his face is numb! He moves his leg to get some feeling back in it and realizes he might not be able to walk once he gets to the shopping center. Might have to stop somewhere first to walk around and get his limbs unfrozen first.

As he drives into the center of town he is moved by the beauty and peacefulness of it. A dry cleaner, a gift shop, an insurance agency, a luncheonette. Pretty How indeed. And just past the town is the shopping center. He checks his suit jacket and tie in the mirror- they look fine. His face is a little red but that will pass. He sees there is a Kings grocery store in the shopping center, on the side opposite from the Woolworth. Good idea, I'll go in there and walk around for a while, plenty of time still.

As he pulls in he thinks about the friends he left behind. Pete and Hack and Mark and

John. Liz and Kathy and Chrissie. Parties upstairs at the Hot Dog House. Parties at Hack's, parties parties parties. He doesn't know if he'll ever see any of them again, but then again he doesn't know whom he'll ever see again, and besides, he needs this, needs to start fresh, far from the scene of so much strife and tears these past few months, far also from so many memories.

As he steps out of the car he knows he will not feel his legs. He braces for the bite of the icy air hitting his face. And slowly he walks into the supermarket and then around for a few minutes. After the feeling comes back he walks out and over to the Woolworth store. Someone is just inside the door and sees him walking over. The door opens and a woman's voice says "You must be the new assistant manager!"

"Welcome to our friendly little town of BerNARDSville, pronounce BERnardsville by us locals!"

And with that he walks through the door, out of one life and into another.



*The Woolworth store in Bernardsville NJ where I was manager for a year around 1987.
"Mr S! Mr S! I need change and this lady wants to buy a gold fish!"*

Chapter One Cheap Thrills

Mention JP Gotrock to anyone who ever saw them and you're sure to get a smile and see a sparkle or two in the eyes. One of the few bands to make to the top of the Asbury Park and New Brunswick rock scenes, it was my band throughout most of the 80s. I started it, and kept it going through personnel changes and good times and hard times. And though it still brings tears to my eyes (of pain but also of happiness) I am going to tell you about it here. I'll tell it from the start on through to the aftermath, and I'll try to let you in on how it felt as the events of those days unfolded.

It is a story of sadness, joy, heartbreak, love, much laughter and much disappointment. From 1981 until 1987 it was the passion of my life, more than my wife or family or friends, more than money, more than anything I even did before or after. It started with dreams and ended with cold brutal realities, even a death. But as time passes and it all gets put into perspective, it seems to all fit nicely into the picture of a life well lived. As a good friend once said, don't be sad its over- be happy it happened.

One thing we need to say at the start is that there were in fact two distinct JP Gotrocks. The first was basically an Old Wave/New Wave '60s punk celebration in many ways, raw and primitive. The second was much more polished but still energetic in its own way. We started out right out of high school and college in the first Gotrock, just kids. By the time Gotrock 2 ended, we were all seasoned pros. But there were many threads that ran through both: David Shearn and Neal Schwartz were in both, both had a brash style of attacking R&B standards, both were high-energy rock and roll.

The first JP Gotrock was formed in 1981 and broke up in 1983. The second formed at the end of 1984 and ran until early 1987. Why were there two? Many reasons, but one big one was that David Shearn, our keyboard player just didn't want it to end! Anyone who ever met Dave knew him as a highly passionate person, who wouldn't take no for an answer. "We HAVE to get the band back together!"

Another thing to keep in mind: This is the big-hair, Duran Duran '80s we're talking about here. The first Gotrock was a blatant attack on the newly minted MTV mindset: We were out to prove that Yes! The music does matter! But not in some artsy or progressive rock way- in the only way we knew, which was -through our passion for it.

After one of the very first rehearsals we went over to our drummer John's house and there was a TV set turned on. "Video Killed The Radio Star" was on the TV. "Hey," someone said- "it's the new music channel, MTV!"

It's not that we had anything against MTV but that we thought that the music was

getting lost in all that mascara and hairspray. We had plenty of favorite bands on MTV but it was about the MUSIC, not the HAIRSPRAY, STUPID!

As I look back on those years I see a lot of things that I missed while I was living through those times. The strife was unbearable at times, and it's often hard to have any appreciation for what is going on around you when you are struggling. And the intensity was very much manic. There is no other word to describe it- Gotrock was my passion and I was gonna make it work no matter what!!! Unfortunately that is one of my faults- I tend to be a bit too intense with whatever I am preoccupied with at any given time. But at the time I was right out school, so I supposed that forgives at least some of that intensity and maniacal passion.

Mostly these days I am just proud of what went on back then though- The gigs, the friendships, the adoration and especially the great music. The feeling of hundreds of people stomping their feet and shaking the walls to the music YOU are making, that YOU are creating. That's a thrill few people will ever experience, and yet I've been lucky enough in my career to have experienced it with several bands!

So now here is my little tale of JP Gotrock, the band that was mine and the people and places who were involved in that great time and place. And speaking of thrills...

Cheap Thrills

Talk to any music lover who's been in the New Brunswick area for a while and mention Cheap Thrills. They are sure to smile at you and go gaga.

Us old fogeys often tell the younguns what a rush it used to be to walk into a record store back when they existed. Probably the greatest record store of all time for us Jersey fogeys was called Cheap Thrills.

Situated in downtown New Brunswick right on George Street, it was walking distance from the College Ave campus where I lived the first year and a short bus ride from the other campuses of Rutgers. Inside you could find anything from John Coltrane to the Swingin' Medallians, to Howlin' Wolf and Albert King. And find it we did, my friend Mark and I through our Rutgers years and beyond!

Why do I mention this? Because many of the tunes of Gotrock 1 came from this store. The punk rock movement of the late 70s and early 80s had its roots in the Midwestern punk movement of the mid 60s, when hundreds of teenaged Beatles and Stones wannabees such as ? and the Mysterians, The Troggs, The Rivieras, The 13th Floor Elevators etc etc were signed on to mostly one-hit-wonderhood by major and indie labels. And Cheap Thrills seemed to have them all!

As Mark and I amassed our record collection, supplemented by trips to New York and to

Jacks in Red Bank(remember- no Amazon.com in those days!!!), the fever got into our blood and into my blood in particular. So as I finished up my degree in Music I began making plans to take this music even one step further.

The idea I had was to do black music and 60s punk as it was meant to be played. I wasn't interested in playing the black music such as Wilson Picket and Motown to sound black, I just wanted it to sound like rock and roll. And I wasn't interested in three chord punk either- I just wanted to use it as a take off point for my own passion for rock and roll.

In 1981, my days at Rutgers winding down, I decided to move forward.

Stagefright

Tim Cusack was raised in a strict, conservative Catholic environment, as he will tell you. Straight middle class, no handouts- you will work your butt off and you will be on the straight and narrow!

Dunna how that went wrong, but somehow somewhere someone must have told him about Rock and Roll! Still on the straight and narrow pretty much(Tim has always been a hard worker and is Vice Pres of an oil company today), he indulged his passion for rock and roll after graduating from catholic school by studying guitar with me, listening to Bruce and 60s rock and R&B and forming a band called Stagefright. Composed of kids from school and from the neighborhood, Stagefright performed at keggers and a few bar gigs and drew hefty crowds. And Tim was a natural, it turned out. I marveled at his stage presence and intensity, and we quickly became close friends and fans of each other. I was impressed by Tim's command of a stage and he drew on my technical knowledge and the vastness of a repertoire gained by performing solo for several years while in college.

So at about the same time Stagefright was beginning to falter (some were moving out of the area, others just giving up), plans were underway...

Bass player would be no problem. Chris Spiewak was Stagefright's bass player and he was solid as a rock, and as it turned out, ready to follow Tim and I into the abyss.

But the drummer HAD to be someone special. Not just any drummer would do. We needed someone solid and intense, a cross between Charlie Watts, Al Jackson Jr of Stax fame, and those double-beat snare hitting surf drummers of the early 60s.

We put out a newspaper ad and quickly got the perfect answer: John Fitzpatrick. John was a couple of years younger than Tim and myself (actually not 18 yet). He was

already a great drummer and was young enough and flexible enough to let us mold him. "Play harder- hit that snare!!!"

Now all we needed was a rehearsal place. That proved to be no problem either- there was a place right in Asbury Park that fitted our needs.

The Hot Dog House

By the late '70's Asbury Park's business district was a ghost town. Burned out shells stood where the offices of the high and mighty (like my dad, Judge Schnitzer "The hangin' Judge!" as Vini likes to tell me Bruce called him) once existed. Cookman Avenue was a particular mess, and it took until the early part of this century for it to come back at all.

Bad for Asbury was great for rock and roll though. The slumlords who owned these buildings would offer rooms to bands for as little as the 100.00 per month that we were charged (never mind that they often didn't pay their electric bill!).

One such place was the former location of the Asbury Park Business College, on the 700 block of Cookman. Owned by John Parkin and Robert Centorino, it housed a bar, a gymnasium, a corner magazine stand and several burned out storefronts.

Upstairs were several abandoned offices, where several bands made their home. In one room were Asbury legends Paul Whistler and The Wheels, in another was Toogie and The Gang, a black group whom I had known from high school, across the hall was a very loud metal band whose members later became part of Bon Jovi, and another band called the Boom Babies.

John and Robert spent their time scheming ways of turning some of the storefronts into extra cash. One of their projects was a junk store "Dillinger wore this hat when the FBI caught up with him!"

Eventually, convinced that redevelopment was just around the corner (it wasn't- though a new train station was being built it would be another 20+ years before any meaningful change happened on Cookman or anywhere else in Asbury for that matter), they decide to open a fast food stand.

I was walking past and saw them installing restaurant equipment. "New transportation center is going up across the street- we'll have plenty of business feeding all those commuters!" "What are you gonna call it?" "Well we're gonna mostly sell hot dogs, but really good hot dogs. They're cheap and easy to make. So we're gonna call it the 'Hot Dog House'."

Into The Midnight Hour

So now we got a band, rehearsal space, songs- what next? A name.

The Midnight Hour Band. Night Train Express. The Dancing Feet. Nah (though I did like the Midnight Hour Band!).

Then one day I posed the problem to my childhood friends Mark and John, whom I had shared record collections with, and John piped up : "How about that guy on the Flintstones, JP Gotrocks?"

Yeah- JP Gotrock though, in the singular. Now all we needed was a gig.

Over in Neptune was a slowly dilapidating motel called the Holiday, at the corner of Route 66 and Wayside Road (there is a storage facility there now). It had a small luncheonette and a pretty good sized bar attached to it.

It was run by an American Indian named "Chief", but he soon sold to a couple of Israeli nationals. Somehow Chief was convinced by someone that having music in the bar would be an easy cash cow. Soon enough Stagefright and their rivals in Nightwing were sharing nights there.

So that was a great place for our first gig. Since we wanted to look our best, we made several trips to the thrift stores that had taken over Asbury and stocked up on shark-skin jackets, puffy shirts and skinny black pants. A few minutes in one of these stores and you might spend at least 10.00 or so- and walk out with a full wardrobe! Cheap Thrills, indeed.

As Gotrock took the stage for the very first time that night, I remember very clearly the very first song: C||| A||| G||| F|| "I'm gonna wait 'til the Midnight Hour!". About halfway through the song I jumped up, and Tim caught me in the head with his guitar. Next I knew I was laying on the stage and little birds were tweeting over my head, just like in the cartoons. But I soon got up and we finished the song and the set, and the crowd went wild as they say...

From there on things went fairly smoothly over the next few months. The gigs didn't pay much but we were living with our folks mostly anyway, and what little we made we put back into rent for the Hot Dog House, roadies and equipment. Club 95 West (previously known as the Stoney End disco) actually paid us so little we had to count the nickels and dimes to divvy them up!

At one point we were booked at a small bar on the corner of 4th and Kingsley, called Inn The Saddle. This was the "Urban Cowboy" era, and every place had to have a mechanical bull. We played there a few times, and one of those times Lance Larson

came in, saw us and did a song with us. He was going to start performing every Tuesday with his band Lord Gunner at the Stone Pony- would we like to do the first set?

And so for the next few months we were at the Pony every Tuesday night. I was still going to Rutgers so I had to drive straight from a music history class to be there on time. And guess who else was there every Tuesday, sitting by himself and waiting patiently to jam with his buddy Lance? You know who I mean. Several of my friends have his autograph from those nights, and there are one or two who have jackets he autographed.

I will never forget the first set I ever played at the Pony. We planned on doing about 12-14 songs and by that time we were very well rehearsed. One song would end and the other would start right up : 1 2 3 4! Just like the Ramones. At the end of the 14 songs Tim and I look at our watches and realized that only a little over a half hour had gone by!

Now you have to remember, these were the days of progressive rock, and Asbury musicians at this time were very much into outdoing each other musically. Long, loud solos were the norm. For a band to average only about 2:30 per song was very much outside the norm at the time. And that was to be a trademark of the first JP Gotrock. Every few songs we would try to stretch out a little (such as "Gloria" by Van Morrison or "Sweet Jane"), but mostly we wanted our stuff to be fast and short.

About this time, Clarence Clemons opened up Big Man's West, a huge venue up in Red Bank. We played there a few times also. Things were going well for us, and we were all very happy that in a few short months (of very hard work though) we were making our mark on the local scene. And as it turned out, there were a lot more thrills to come – 1982 was just around the corner, and that year would see us conquer another great NJ music town, the great Hub City of New Brunswick.



Al-Vis and Tim Cusack at JP Gotrock's room at the Hot Dog House, Halloween 1982.

Chapter 2 The New Brunswick Years



JP Gotrock's single 45, Out Of Control released in September 1982

At the end of 1981 JP Gotrock was in great shape. We had just gotten done with a 3 month stint at the Stone Pony on Tuesday nights, were getting calls for parties, newspaper interviews and plenty of bar gigs. In 1982 things would only get better and better.

I graduated from Rutgers University with a BA in Music Composition in January of 1982. My plans were to just continue with the band, along with whatever private instructions I could handle in the mean time.

There were still some problems with JP Gotrock, one of them being the bass player. Our original bass player Chris Spiewak was still with us but he wanted out and we couldn't find anyone suitable to replace him. And we also would have like to have a sax player but those were hard to come by, though the Jersey Shore's own legendary Tommy Labella did come by and check us out at one point.

Neal and Dave And The Glove That Fit

One night at the Stone Pony a guy came up to me wearing a dark suit, coke bottle glasses, obviously having had a few of whatever drinks was in his double shot glass. I would like to pose a question to all of the musicians who may be reading this:

What would you think if some guy in a dark suit came up to you right after you did your set at the Stone Pony, wherever and said to you, first thing out of his mouth: "I saw you at Big Man's West last week-You guys are terrific! But you need a keyboard player and you HAVE to let me play with you!!!"

I'll tell you what I thought and what I said: This guys either a nut from one of the halfway houses in the neighborhood or he's a genius. The other guys in the band though even worse: "He's a narc, Al! Everyone knows the cops have their eyes on the Hot Dog House, they think we're all a buncha druggies!" "Nah," was my reply. "They would have at least stuck a Ramones t-shirt on him, not just a dark suit." "So what are we gonna do, Al, he'll have us all arrested!" "Invite him to rehearsal, what else are we gonna do?"

So on that fateful night in the Winter of 1981 David Shearn made it down to the Hot Dog House "Boy has this neighborhood gone downhill!" was the first thing he said when he walked through the door. He walk over to Tim's piano, we called off 1-2-3-4 and history was made.

Up until this time Gotrock was very much a high energy but slightly primitive sounding affair. John's drums were on the money but he was very young, and Tim's rhythm guitar was solid but he was usually just a bit out of tune, and he played very loud. With David in the band the level of musicianship was starting to rise significantly. This is what happens when you get very talented musicians together- you all rise to the level of the most talented in the band. At that point it was David, and not only did he play with a ferocity and drive that I'd never heard before in a piano player, but he also played with a genuine love for the music, which was very important to me.

David was not the type of person you would know casually. He was either your best friend or your enemy. He was so highly opinionated that many people hated him right off the bat, but once you got to know him and knew where that was coming from, not only did you forgive that, but you got to see a genuinely good, honest, and sincere person. And I can certainly say that he became one of the three driving forces in my music career very quickly. For the next several years I never made a decision or thought a thought about my music without also pondering "What would David think?"

We still needed a bass player. Fortunately David knew plenty of musicians. He very quickly made a suggestion/demand: "You guys gotta check out my friend Neal, he's the greatest of them all!"

Neal Schwartz was also a veteran of the New Brunswick rock scene, and probably the greatest bass player I'll ever perform with. He was just a natural, never needed coaching or instructing. Never needed the chords or the intro or outro. And he played with a feeling and soulfulness that matched everyone else's in Gotrock.

Think of a perfectly fitting glove. Finger one fits perfectly, finger two, etc. Now finger five is fitting perfectly. The excitement was palpable.

And Neal had one more thing going for him: He was already a star on the New

Brunswick scene. His good looks and attitude won him the adoration of many fans in the Hub City, and JP Gotrock was just about to benefit from that popularity.

One rehearsal night in the late winter of 1982 Neal told us of a new place that was just starting to have music. It was a little place but the college crowd loved it, and the local bands were starting to get booked there.

Gotrock Sets The Hub City On Fire (almost)

Situated at the corner of Spring and Court Streets in downtown New Brunswick, the Court Tavern was an unassuming little place. Just a bar and a dining room upstairs and a few small rooms downstairs. There was no stage but the people there loved music of all kinds: blues, jazz, and especially new wave/rock and roll.

Some of the bands that played there during that time had names like "The Steel Tips", "The Rockin' Bricks", "The Home Boys", "Bob White and The White Boys", "The Smithereens" (yes them). And from 1982 until the end of 1983 one of the most popular bands ever to perform there was us, JP Gotrock.

I said earlier that I was going to try to give you guys an idea of what it felt like back in those days, but there really is no way to describe it when people are lining up around the block to see your band, pushing the fire code laws inside and stomping, screaming and being out of control in many other ways- and it's your music and your band that they are doing this for.

Month after month and gig after gig we packed the Court. And since there was no stage and no dance floor, the crowd was right on top of us. In fact, in the very early days we were often not even sure whether we were going to perform upstairs or downstairs. Eventually a stage was built downstairs and even a PA was put in and a sound man hired. But in those early days, it was as primitive a setup as you could imagine.

Tim likes to tell the story of a close call we had there once. We had our own light show and would clip the lights to John's drum set. Well, one packed night at the Court this turned out to be not such a good idea- the shellac on the shell of his bass drum caught fire. Like I said, the place was already a fire code violation. Our fast-thinking roadie Kevin heroically picked up the burning set and threw it up the stairs and out into Court Street, saving us all. After the fire was put out John continued to play the bass drum. In fact, he kept the bass drum exactly the way it was for every gig after that as a memorial to the time when he almost literally set the town of New Brunswick on fire!

There are so many memories of this time that it is difficult to catalog them all, and besides, that's not the purpose of this. The point is that by the summer of 1982 JP Gotrock had risen from just a bunch of high school friends to be near the top of both the Asbury Park and New Brunswick music scenes.

By the end of the summer of 1982 we were also starting to get noticed by the local media as well.

Articles in several local papers appeared, including the Home News, whose music editor Pete Parisi took a special interest in us and wrote several pieces about us.

Next on the agenda was to do some recording, so we took three songs that I had been working on (and Tim was also writing a lot back then) and put them onto vinyl.

Our single consisted of three songs: "Rock and Roll Reunion", "Living On Dreams" and "Out Of Control". To promote we booked radio appearances and put copies in several New Brunswick and Asbury area record stores. Then we held a special record release party at the Stone Pony.

This was in the fall of 1982, one year after our first engagement at the Pony. Lord Gunner was no longer performing there on Tuesdays, but a band called Back To Earth had been offered the gig. Back To Earth was formed with members of The Shots, which was a band fronted by Donnie Bertelson that I had followed around a few years earlier. The Shots were in turn a spinoff of the Asbury Jukes, with trumpet player Tony Palligrossi and sax player Carlo Novi being the original horn section of the Jukes.

And so began our second several-month engagement at the Stone Pony. This was a lot different than the one we did in 1981, but it had its high moments. At one point we were booked to share a Saturday night with our friends in Nightwing. To be headlining at both the Court Tavern and the Stone Pony was probably the high water mark of Gotrock 1's success.

The success continued into 1983. We played at the Court on New Years Eve for the door and I remember getting a call from Neal the next morning: "Guess how much we made last night." "500.00" "That's not bad for the band, a lot more than we used to make" "No Al, 500.00 apiece!"

And then on to other great venues in the New Brunswick and Asbury Park areas: Patrix Pub, Doll's Place, PJ's in Woodbridge, The Rutgers pubs, Cook College Day, frat parties, the Brighton Bar in Long Branch, the Fast Lane and the Deck House in Asbury Park, even Jason's in Belmar.

And the parties- what parties they were. Typically some college kids rented a 4 or 5 bedroom house in New Brunswick. We would plan in the living room or out on the back patio. And hundreds of college kids would swarm the house, shaking the walls and floors.

Gotrock 1's Legacy

Why was JP Gotrock so popular in New Brunswick? Being the right band in the right place at the right time had a lot to do with it.

A lot of the other bands in town were sort of artsy, Velvet Underground/Clash wannabes. There was a lot of great music but the difference with Gotrock was always that intensity. We rocked very hard. And we played fun tunes: "California Sun", "Double Shot Of My Baby's Love", "For Your Love", "Gloria", "Look But You Better Not Touch", "Around And Around", "Walk Don't Run", "One After 909" as well as a few of our own.

In those post Vietnam, post disco, new wave days of the early '80s Gotrock was just new wave enough to be hip but just old wave enough to not be too snobby. At least that's my theory.

But for whatever reason, we were riding the wave. By the end of 1982 we had accomplished almost everything a local band could accomplish. As it turned out that wasn't necessarily a good thing.

Chapter 3 The End Of The Beginning



Steve Schraeger w/ David Shearn, around 1987.

Buying The Cow

By 1983 JP Gotrock had accomplished nearly everything a local band could hope for: plenty of gigs, a good following in two different areas, great lineup, even a single 45.

And I was just about the "Buy The Cow" as Tim used to put it(as in the joke "Why buy the cow when you get the milk free?"). I was going to marry my first wife Sandi, whom I had met in High School, stayed with as she moved back and forth to Tennessee, broken up with and made up with so many times over the past seven years.

I invited several friends going back all the way to my high school days, on through to my new New Brunswick friends to the wedding. And I did one really ballsy thing: I booked my band JP Gotrock to play at it.

Well whether this was a good move or not the band had fun. And though the marriage didn't last it was a fun reception.

At that wedding was a new player in the fate of JP Gotrock, an agent named Art. Art was a young black guy from Lakewood, very friendly, very smooth talking. Besides other bands he also had go go dancers on his roster, and the dancer from my bachelor party at Pat Hackwith's was one of his acts.

But Art was a good example of the type of person one starts to attract as a performer starts to gain some success. I wouldn't call them parasites necessarily, but they do latch

onto you and attempt to profit from you in one way or another. Which would be fine if all worked out- you scratch my back, I scratch yours. But that never seems to be the way it works out. Almost always these types turn out to be either incompetent or worse, even evil.

Misadventures and The End

And as it turns out, there would be several of these types throughout JP Gotrock 1's existence. One thing among many that leading my own band taught me was to never hire an agent you don't know thoroughly.

My wedding would prove to be the start of the end of JP Gotrock 1. We were still in high demand in New Brunswick, including Rutgers, and still had plenty of gigs around Asbury, but dealings with club-owners and financial pressures were starting to prove more and more difficult.

In the summer of 1982 we were playing a party in Shark River Hills when one of the neighbors came over and sat in with us, playing sax. He introduced himself as a musician and said he would be opening a music store soon- would I be interested in teaching there?

Sure enough, a few months later I got a phone call. "Hi Al, it's me Gary Cook. I just opened my store 'The Music Place' in Sea Girt- are you ready to teach?"

Gary was a one of a kind person. Incredibly talented, incredibly sales-oriented, incredibly energetic. Over the next 18 or so years he and I would perform at dozens of clubs and weddings together, and for many of those years I did teach at his store.

At the time another of Gary's sidelines was booking bands. He wanted to book JP Gotrock at a restaurant in East Brunswick called "Good Time Charlies". We did the night but the owner/manager was not happy with us. We were way too loud. Fine, we said, we're just not right for the room.

But what happened next was typical of the kind of mishap that would typify the last few months of Gotrock 1's tenure. We were booked there a second time. Not realizing that the owner was still expecting restaurant music, we proceeded to do our normal set list. After a few songs the owner/manager called me into the back room, told me he wanted us to leave immediately and only after our equipment was unloaded would he pay us.

The problem was that we were booked there for the weekend, and had turned down an engagement at Cook College for the Saturday gig. So not only were we out of luck for the Saturday\$, we had no gig at all left that weekend.

Naturally I was fuming. How could this guy have us back when he knew we weren't

right the first time we played there? I considered taking him to small claims court (Judge Wapner or even Judge Schnitzer, maybe??) but we had no contract, nothing on paper.

Another time we were booked into into a divvy little motel in Lakewood: The Starlight. It was our friend Art who booked us into there, and by this time he was also picking up cash from us by being our roadie. We had played the night before and our equipment was still in his truck.

I showed up at the Starlight with the rest of the band and waited. And waited. Eventually the owner came out, visibly angry, and looking like one of the characters from "Goodfellows", he started screaming at me "You guys are supposed to be playing here! Where is the band???" Not knowing what to say, and fearing for my safety, I left.

After an hour or so went by I got a call from Art "Sorry Al, I was stuck up in North Jersey." "You're sorry? I was almost killed by the club owner!"

And mishaps like these were happening more and more frequently. Which would probably have been OK for a while, but there was another problem cropping up: We were not in agreement on where to take the band next. I wanted to showcase in New York, David and Neil wanted no part of that, just wanted to keep playing the bars and frat houses. I think Tim might have been OK with that, except that he seemed to be getting frustrated and losing interest. At one point I had heard a rumor that he wanted to quit and I confronted him on it. He relented, and said that no he wasn't quite ready to quit yet, we could go on.

But not for long. By the end of 1983 we were disheartened and had no morale left. I pondered continuing the band- David for one didn't want to see it end. But other projects were calling me, projects that could make me more money anyway. I saw no point in continuing something in which everyone wasn't 100% into it, especially with all of the "Good Time Charlie's" lunatics we were dealing with.

One of the last straws came at New Years Eve. The Court asked us to play, and were going to pay us good \$ to do so. But Tim refused. I was crushed. Who did the Court get to play on New Years Eve of 1983-84? The Smithereens, whose first LP had not hit yet.

In a lot of ways I didn't blame Tim but I was hurt and angry nonetheless. I knew that we were blowing it. We were giving up. And even though I had other musical projects beckoning me, I really didn't want to give up. But dealing with Charlie Lunatic and Mr Goodfellow Starlight left such a bad taste in my mouth that I didn't think it was worth it anymore.

And so ended JP Gotrock 1. The seeds of its destruction were in its beginning, I was sure. The kind of intensity and passion necessary to keep something like that going

couldn't last forever. Eventually the energy would run out. And it did.

Interlude

I was more relieved than anything at that point. I was happy to become involved with acts where I was not the one making the hard decisions, where I was not the focus.

One such project was a group called "Conspiracy" (not related to Southern Conspiracy, a band that had been around ten years earlier in the Asbury area). This group seemed to typify what I wanted to do next: just play fun rock and roll for extra cash in the bars. As it turns it was pretty much a precursor of Chik-A-Boom, a band I would be with for more than 19 years that did just that.

Consisting of some friends from my high school days and a quirky but highly talented female singer name Maureen Coughlin, we managed to play a few bars in Belmar and Asbury before I moved on, the singer having quit also. Another band was one I got together to do weddings and bars with Bill Doolittle called "The Emerald City Band". Still another was an original band put together by local songwriter-producer Steve Betts called "Kino".

So I had plenty of music, and I was working full time in the Monmouth Mall as a stock clerk, for the health insurance for Sandi and me. All in all it wasn't a bad time, musically or personally: marriage was still good, music all around and no more loony club owners to deal with.

The one day the phone rang. "Al, face it, none of this stuff you're doing is ever going to go anywhere. Let's get it back together!" It was David Shearn. He had found a singer to take Tim's place and was hell-bent on making another attempt at JP Gotrock. And as usual, he wouldn't take no for an answer. Which was a good thing in this case.

Chapter 4 JP Gotrock 2

Questions...

When David called me to order me, demand that I get the band back together there were many unanswered questions. About the only thing I was sure of is that none of my other projects were worth anything compared to what we had with JP Gotrock.

Don Erdman was from Union, a veteran of several bands including Hot Romance with Billy Hector. He was a tremendously gifted front man, singer and blues harp player. So the vocals would be no problem.

We no longer had the Hot Dog House to rehearse at, so that would be an issue. As it turned out, David had bought a house over the border from New Brunswick in Somerset, so that problem would be solved also.

The drummer was a problem though. The one David had picked for us was a fine musician but he was more of a Jazz drummer, and that didn't sit well with me at all. I have played drums long before I switched to guitar, and my cousin Marty was in a famous 60s band called The Cyrkle. I knew what our drummer should be like and this guy was not right.

So we rehearsed and did our first few gigs. Mostly everything sounded fine. Then at one point we got booked into Mrs Jays in Asbury Park and our drummer couldn't make it. Don had said that he had been in touch with Vini Lopez recently, why not ask him?

Vini had been in a band with Big Danny Gallagher called Underdog but it was at a stopping point, so he was looking to either get it going again or try something else. I don't think he or we planned it that way, but he was about to become JP Gotrock 2's drummer.

Vini Joins and David Goes Ga Ga

I had known Vini through his cousin John- in fact it was John who gave us the name JP Gotrock. And David knew Vini through Bruce Springsteen – he had seen them at Rutgers and booked them at a Woodbridge High School dance back in the early days.

Having nothing to lose, since I knew Vini and Don were already good friends, we had Vini fill in for us at the Mrs Jays gig. And guess what- that glove??? It was fitting perfectly again! Vini was nothing short of spectacular at his first gig, with no rehearsal. I was in awe of his feel for the music, and was more than happy to have his third

vocals back behind us. Vini is one of rock's great singing drummers, but I didn't know that before. I knew it now.

And David was absolutely in reverence of Vini. You couldn't have picked a drummer whom he would be more thrilled with. As one of the "Woodbridge People" who followed Bruce and later Southside around from gig to gig, he was in disbelief that that greatest drummer he had ever know of was playing drums with us.

And so began the adventure. If JP Gotrock 1 was a rollercoaster, Gotrock 2 was more like a Tilt-Awhirl, spinning constantly and intensively. We were in for quite a ride.

Whirling and Tilting

And they were really two different bands, with two different attitudes and outlooks on music. JP Gotrock 1 was very much a punk/new wave affair, with sets of 2 minute songs, loud aggressive rhythm guitars and ferocious tempos. Got rock 2 was just as passionate but were into a groove thing, tight musicianship and harmonies. I wasn't sure that we should have kept the name but again David thought why not, we're still playing a lot of the same tunes?

Throughout 1985 and 1986 we played all over New Brunswick- Dolls Place, The Corner Tavern, back at the Court Tavern, the Rutgers pubs, frat parties. And in Asbury Park we were still headlining at places like the Deckhouse, Mrs Jays and did several performances at the Pony. Up in Watching NJ we were regulars at a place called O'Connors. This was a restaurant with a bar that was a favorite of the locals. One night the management complained that the people in the bar were annoying the people in the restaurant- could we please calm them down!!!!???

The Asbury Park Rock and Roll Museum



*Inside the Asbury Park Rock n Roll Museum, 1988.
My band JP Gotrock was honored to perform at their opening party at the Pony in 1986.*

In 1986 some local Bruce fans and memorabilia collectors opened up a museum inside Palace Amusements. Billy Smith, his wife Ruth and Steve Bumball got the idea to pool the stuff they had amassed along with some other donations and put together a

showcase of the history of Asbury Park's music scene in the 60s and 70s. I donated a picture of me at the Quack Quack. It was an astonishing collection and proved to be a national sensation right off the bat.

Billy, Steve and Ruth were regulars at JP Gotrock 2 performances. So it was only natural that they would ask us to perform at the museum's opening and in 1986 JP Gotrock and several other stalwarts of the Asbury Park music scene at the time performed at special grand opening celebration of the Asbury Park Rock and Roll Museum at The Stone Pony. It was a great show for anyone who remembers it, and I know we had a blast.

Also in 1986 Backstreets, the Bruce fanzine, interviewed us and put a huge picture of us in the article they wrote. This was about the time of Born In The USA and Bruce was everywhere in the media. We weren't sure how far it would take US, in particular but then again all we really wanted to do at that point was just play great music, we really weren't on any kind of mission.

And that we did. Vini did some Jimmy Buffet songs and his standard "Spider and The Fly", in addition to helping me back up Donnie's vocals. He and Neil and David and Donnie all played great together- there was never any problem with the music.

But sometime during that period things started to not go so well with Neil. He (and in turn we were) was going through some issues that were tough for everyone to handle. Eventually he decided to move all the way up to Clifton NJ (which was an hour north of New Brunswick even). For several reasons we had to make a decision about him, but one of the things that made the decision easy was that we had an incredibly talented bass player waiting in the wings.



The 2 Vins! Trappers in PA 1989.

Vinnie Roslin had played with Vini and Bruce in Steel Mill. I know I have said that Neil was the greatest bass player of them all, but Vinnie was at least tied with Neil in every way. I am still thrilled to watch him play- he has such a feel for the music and a soulfulness that it transfixes me! Neil was not happy about it (and we made a lot of

other people unhappy, as it turned out) but we made the decision to go with Vinnie, whom we were calling "Little Vinnie", to difference him from Vini.

And so the fun and great music continued. I actually got to perform with Vinnie in several bands after JP Gotrock broke up, and I can say that any band I was in with him was the best band I was ever in!

And the success continued. Lines formed everywhere to see us, and since we had now been around several years jobs were no problem.

Around this time, as I have said, David bought a house in Somerset, just over the border from New Brunswick. When we weren't rehearsing there there was also a rehearsal spot in downtown New Brunswick over a porno shop, and a lot of times we would just setup our equipment and rehearse in the afternoon at whatever venue we were performing at that night, such as the Court Tavern or the Deck House or Mrs Jays.

One thing about playing with Vini that you learn very quickly (besides his great sense of humor and love of joke-telling – I must have heard more jokes from him in those years than at any time since or before!) is that he has his own cast of characters around him. Besides the Asbury Rock Museum guys, there was Tinker, OB, Tex (really Roslin's friend though), a woman named Helyn and a guy named Danny Gallagher. Playing and hanging around Vini introduced me to a world of new people, and many of them would go on to shape my career's future. Helyn was Helyn Chrobocinski and I went on to help her with the entertainment at the Clearwater Festival for nearly 20 years. And Danny Gallagher was Big Danny (AKA The Round Mound Of Sound as Bruce called him) who would play a huge part in my career over the next few years.

So which Gotrock was better? I can't say. They were both great. Many musicians, if they are lucky, will play in at least one band that is absolutely the greatest group of musicians they could hope for. In my life there have been several, and two of them had the same name.

But nothing lasts and in a business where 2 years is the average lifespan of a band, change was coming. Reflecting back on those years I have to say I was nothing but very very lucky! As we will see, even though Gotrock came to an end, the music continued unbroken (well almost unbroken as we will also see). Don't be sad it's over, be happy it happened. Indeed.

Chapter 5 The End Of JP Gotrock and Many New Beginnings



Frankie Lee at the original Lone Star Cafe in New York, 1987.

Full Steam Ahead

By the summer of 1986 JP Gotrock was going full steam. The Corner Tavern and the Court Tavern in New Brunswick, the Deck House and Mrs Jays in Asbury Park, everywhere we were drawing crowds and getting requests for parties, weddings etc.

We performed at the Clearwater Festival at Sandy Hook that August, my first ever gig there, and things were still looking bright as day. In retrospect that was the beginning of the end of Gotrock 2 and all of Gotrock.

Pressures Build To Wrap It All Up

What were some of the factors leading to the end? There were many.

Sometime during JP Gotrock 2's reign, a couple of blues singers, Frankie Lee and Sonny Rhodes, decided to relocate to the New Brunswick area from the west coast. A group of musicians were assembled to back them up and David was selected to play keyboards for them.

Frankie was a soul singer in the tradition of Al Green and Bobby Blue Bland. Sonny was a delta blues musician in the vein of Muddy Waters. Both were authentic bluesmen, having been raised in the south and recorded for black record labels long before the interest of white audiences had been established.

Once they set up their base in New Brunswick they began performing throughout the

East Coast in places like Boston, Baltimore, New York and Washington DC. It was quite a grueling way to perform- one nighters a few hours in each direction. Sometimes they would get hotel rooms for extended engagements but usually it was leave New Brunswick, do the gig then drive back.

So it goes without saying that this was going to be taking more and more time from David. In addition to performing in Frankie's band, David let Frankie stay with him at the house in Somerset for extended periods of time, including when I was living with him.

David was also taking other jobs at this time- there was an Elvis impersonator named Larry "The Big El" Seth who performed twice a year, as Dave put it- on Elvis' death day and on his birthday.

So David had plenty of work and was very much enjoying it. He still very much enjoyed playing with Gotrock but his focus was very much elsewhere. The reason why this is an important point is that we have to keep in mind that it was in fact David who engineered JP Gotrock's resurgence.

The rest of the band were still very much into Gotrock but there were times when even here the focus began to drift. The Clearwater Festival performance in August 1986 felt like it should have given us yet another boost, but as it turned out the road was proving downhill from there. It was getting more difficult to get everyone together to even accept a gig, because either this one wasn't available or that one didn't want to perform.

So far none of this would have proven fatal though. But now we get to what was going on with me at the time.

Sometime in the Spring of '86 I went up to Aberdeen to do some recording with Steve Betts, whom I had performed with in Kino, and original band, a few years earlier. I felt fine and my voice was in fine shape. The next day I went into my job at a card store in the Monmouth Mall, where I worked as a stock clerk for the medical benefits, and my tummy started to hurt. I came home early and went to bed but the pain only got worse. After a while I called my father up to take me to the emergency room.

The next few days were pretty much a blur. I remember waking up the following Saturday morning and Vini and David were standing there. I felt a tube going down my nose and blood on my face.

We were booked at the Deckhouse that night and since David hadn't heard anything much about how I was he decided to come down and see for himself. I had been admitted to the hospital on Tuesday so I was nearly comatose for four days.

When I asked what was wrong with me they told me that my blood pressure was through the roof. I hadn't had a stroke but other than that they weren't sure what the problem was. After stabilizing my blood pressure the pain had gone down. They ran some more tests on me and I was home after another few days.

I was on a very low sodium diet for the next few months (keep in mind, I was 28 years old!) and on minoxidil and a water pill. Still no word on what was wrong with me. This was going on through the summer of 1986.

In September I got a call from my doctor. One of the radiologists spotted something on my right kidney. They would need to operate immediately to see what it was. Whether it was cancer, a tumor, or whatever no one could tell me.

In October I went in for surgery and they found that my kidney was so badly damaged that they had to remove it. It was infarcted and diseased. However, my left kidney was fine.

In order to remove the kidney they had to nearly cut me in half. To this day I have the surgery scar going halfway around my body around my belly area. These were the days before minimally invasive surgery.

The staples they put in me afterwards hurt more than anything else. I couldn't drive in a car or walk or do anything physical, much less perform, without being in a lot of pain.

To top it off, the wheels were coming off my first marriage. We had always bickered back and forth but over the past two years bickering was turning to shouting and shouting was turning to screaming and even worse.

After I got out of the hospital in October I told my wife I'd had enough. She could move back in with her parents. I wasn't sure what I was going to do, but I would keep the apartment until after the first of the year. Fortunately we had no property to divide and no children. Once the emotional anguish (which was and still is considerable) was gotten past the divorce would be fairly simple.

And as if that wasn't enough, Vini had gotten a job as a caretaker for a large estate up in Brewster New York, and it was a live-in job. He was effectively moving out of the area.

In January 1987 JP Gotrock played its last local gig- a wedding at the Elks in New Brunswick. Then a couple of weeks later we all went up to Brewster and stayed with Vini as we performed in a club over in Danbury. The local paper did a huge full page spread on Vini. Big Danny came up and did several songs with us. We had a great time. It was our last gig.

New Beginnings

But in a lot of ways, it wasn't ending. Only JP Gotrock was ending. Consider this: Vini and Dave and Vinnie and I continued to perform with Danny in the Mighty Whoosies. Our only performance was at the Deck House, but I continued to perform with Danny for several more years. And eventually Vini moved back to the area and we formed the Disco Rejects. David was playing with the Big El and Frankie Lee and Sonny Rhodes- he was getting to meet all of his idols like Doctor John and Robert Cray. So he was very happy.

So I like to think of that time as more of a transition. JP Gotrock was ending and whole world of beginnings was unfolding in front of me and in front of all of us.

The year after Gotrock folded I was in a video that was shot on the roof of the Stone Pony, for his "Don't Stop Dreamin" single. Two years later I was recording with Vini and helping him with the Maddog jam over at the T-Birds Café in Asbury Park. And in 1991, on a hot August Sunday night, Lee Mrowicki uttered those now famous words at the Stone Pony: "Ladies and gentlemen, for the first time ever the Stone Pony is proud to present Chik-A-Boom!"

Chapter 6 Aftermath



Big Danny Gallagher, Al-Vis and David Shearn at the Deck House in 1987, as Big Danny and the Mighty Whoosies.

Housemates

In January 1987 I loaded up my dad's Plymouth Valiant and drove it up to David Shearn's house to live with him until I got settled into a new job somewhere and hopefully a new life. I was prepared to never look back, though many elements of my previous life would be hard to shake. For one thing, JP Gotrock was ending for good this time, so it seemed.

Also staying with David at the time was Frankie Lee, of Port Arthur TX by way of Oakland CA. Frankie was a tremendously talented soul singer who had a hit in the 60s with a song called "Full Time Love". David was playing in Frankie's backup band so it was an easy decision to let him stay at his house when he was in town.

And so for the next two and a half years we were housemates, David, Frankie and me. For the record, I did try to move out a few times, I certainly had the \$. I was working as a Woolworth assistant manager so that was no problem. But each time David talked me out of it. He seemed happy with the arrangement.

Life was good for us, relatively care-free and we were all doing things we loved doing. I

was having a good time (though it could be hard work) at Woolworth giving refunds on sickly hamsters and dearly departed goldfish, David was working as an engineer for the AP, and Frankie and David were doing one-nighters all over the east coast.

David's house became the place for a lot of musicians to hang. Not only did Frankie's band rehearse there, but Big Danny, Vini, Steve Schraeger and Vinnie Roslin were regular guests.

In the beginning David and I were rehearsing with Big Danny for a project that went on to be called The Mighty Whoosies (not sure if it was Vini or Danny who came up with that name). I wasn't able to perform much because of my work schedule, but I performed as much as I could.

In the summer of 1988 I was working in the Westfield Woolworth and was sent into the stock room to retrieve a box of paper goods. The ladder was a little old and unsteady and the next thing I knew after reaching the top and grabbing for the box was that I was laying on the floor of the stockroom screaming for help. There was a huge bulge where my right foot used to be.

As it turned out, I had fallen and tried to land on my right heel. I did exactly that, and crushed it.

After a cast and months of physical therapy I was able to walk again, but in the meantime things were rough for me. First of all I was living far from my parents and had few friends in New Brunswick, so there was literally no one to help me. Simple tasks like going to the grocery store became monumental achievements- I had to learn how to balance just enough food to last me a day or so in a bag in one hand while negotiating a crutch with the other. Driving was nearly impossible for a while, since I am right-handed.

To make it worse, Frankie had this routine. He would get home from a weekend of gigs, go to the grocery store, build a pot of something or other (I'm still not sure what it was but it was definitely looking back at me when I looked into it!). Then he would lie down on the couch and open up a bottle of whatever he was drinking. The pot was boiling on the stove. Then he would drink some more and the pot would boil some more.

By this time I was upstairs in my room and beginning to smell smoke. Since I couldn't walk down the stairs I would crawl, and start screaming "Frankie! Wake up! You're burning down the house! The house is on fire!"

At this point he was usually passed out so I would have to try to make it over to the stove to turn it off.

This happened at least a half dozen times over the next couple of months and

fortunately I was successful in turning off the stove and not allowing David's house to burn down. And I never got to taste what was looking back at me in the pot.

The rest of that summer after my injury I spent hanging out with Big Danny, Steve Schraeger and Vinnie Roslin, in what came to be known as the Power 13 Band. I would stay over Danny's (he lived on Main Street over a bar called JP Maloney's) and sometimes they would even come to New Brunswick and stay with us. I played at the Clearwater Festival with Danny, along with many other gigs and we formed a life-long friendship that only ended when he passed away of pneumonia in 2007.

By this time David was too busy performing with Frankie to play with Danny, but we did manage a couple of JP Gotrock reunion gigs- one at the Court Tavern and another at a friend's back yard party. And when he wasn't performing David was hanging out at the Court Tavern or J August, a swanky, artsy restaurant that was a favorite of the Rutgers arts crowd.

Forever Young

David was having the time of his life but there was one big problem. His drinking, which had always been uncontrolled, was getting worse and worse. One night on the way to a Sunday night jam session at J August he was shaking with DTs. He asked me to turn the car around and drive him to the hospital. I tried to do so but he stopped me half way there and refused to go.

Over the next few months I was performing with Danny and a lot of other bands while my foot injury was healing. There was plenty of music so I wasn't really thinking at all of how things had ended with JP Gotrock.

One of the things David liked to do when I lived with him was to come home from a gig, and if Frankie wasn't around he would come upstairs to my room, wake me up and drag me down to the piano: "Come on Al, let's sing some songs!" Never mind that I had to get up in a few hours for work or whatever. David could never take No for an answer. His favorite song to sing with me? "Forever Young" by Bob Dylan.

One day in the summer of 1989 David decided to stay home from work to catch up on some housekeeping chores, fixing locks and such. He said he was going to the Court later and maybe New York after that. He ended up asleep on his couch, as I remember, watching the 1950s version of The Titanic. I looked in and David was snoring- just as the passengers on the Titanic were singing "God Save The Queen."

That night I was booked at Christie's in Ocean with Howard "The Bopper" Parker. I came in about midnight or so. David was back from his night's adventure- his bedroom door was closed. I had something to eat and went upstairs to bed.

The next morning the phone rang- it was the Associated Press where he worked. He hadn't called in sick but he hadn't shown up for work either.

So I said I'd track him down and have him check in with them.

I went downstairs and heard David's radio blasting. Frankie was asleep on the couch. David's door was closed.

I knocked on David's door. "David! Work just called, are you going in?" No answer. Then I knocked harder and yelled louder. Frankie jumped up and ran over to David's door. "David!" he yelled. He kicked the door in. I ran over to the other side of the house screaming "No No No..."

The rest of the day was filled with police, coroners and other emergency personnel. As they took his lifeless body away I waved one last goodbye to my friend. I made arrangements to stay with friends down in Belmar and left in the afternoon.

The funeral was on a stormy Friday, at a funeral home in Woodbridge. Afterwards I rode in the car with Guy, Bev and Doug, David's "Woodbridge People" friends who had follow Bruce and Vini around back in the 70s, out to Mt Carmel PA where he was to be buried.

Rain threatened for the entire three hour drive. We showed up at the cemetery, and as it turned out it was on a hill in the middle of Pennsylvania's coal country. As soon as they lowered the casket into the ground the sun broke through the clouds and light shone all over the graves.

I began this little tale with a journey, the trip I made to the Woolworth store in Bernardsville that fatefully cold February day in 1987 as I showed up for my first day of work. I'm going to end it here with another journey.

On the ride home from Woodbridge on the train I had lots of time to reflect on not only the past two and a half years, but also on all the years since we started rehearsals in the Hot Dog House and first hit the stage at the Holiday. As we passed the Matawan and Hazlet and Middletown stations it was a yet another lonely ride at the end of yet another painful event in my life.

On that journey in 1987 up through the mountains of Somerset County, I was very numb. Now the tears started though, and they flowed and flowed. Not just for all that was lost, I think now, but for all that had been gained over the past two and a half and even over all of the past eight years.

Life wasn't over for me, not by a long shot. It was changing though and that's something I couldn't stop. I could stomp my feet and scream and drink myself into

another kidney failure, but life would keep changing and here I am twenty years later and twenty years older.

David was 33 when he died. He would have been 54 this coming September.

The words to Forever Young:

“May God bless and keep you always,
May your wishes all come true,
May you always do for others
And let others do for you.
May you build a ladder to the stars
And climb on every rung,
May you stay forever young,
Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.

May you grow up to be righteous,
May you grow up to be true,
May you always know the truth
And see the lights surrounding you.
May you always be courageous,
Stand upright and be strong,
May you stay forever young,
Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.

May your hands always be busy,
May your feet always be swift,
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift.
May your heart always be joyful,
May your song always be sung,
May you stay forever young,
Forever young, forever young,
May you stay forever young.”

Don't Stop the Dreamin'

As I said, I continued playing with Danny and Vini for a while longer, eventually ending up in Chik-A-Boom and even a few other bands. I helped run the Clearwater festival for many years, David's favorite charity. I have played on many recordings, including with one singer in particular who later one turned out to be just as influential in her way as David was in his way.

And I also performed on the original version of a song Big Danny wrote. Years later Danny released it on his CD "Big Danny and the Lost Leader Band" with a different lineup. But I played on the original version. Others on that recording are Jerry Carboy, Rich Mitchel and Vini Lopez.

I am going to end this story with the song's refrain:

"Don't stop the dreaming
There's a lot of dreams that need to come true."

Next time you drive through Asbury Park, pull over onto Cookman Ave, especially if you're driving at night. Look up at the building at the corner of Cookman and Main, and listen.

Or the next time you're in New Brunswick, drive past the Court Tavern at night, especially on a weekend. Or if you're down near the ocean in Asbury, drive past the Stone Pony. Open the car windows and listen. Chances are the band you are hearing in one of those places is just about to take a journey, maybe even a few journeys. Maybe their journey will be steadier than mine was. Maybe it will be even rockier. Maybe it will be up a mountain highway in the middle of winter or on a train somewhere.

But stop and listen- and pay attention to what you are hearing. It could be the sound of dreams coming true. For all those years back in the 80s and beyond, that's what it has always sounded like to me.



The building where the Hot House Studios resides at the corner of Cookman and Main, as it looks today.



Hot Dog House Studios in 2009

Acknowledgements

My tale is a small one but the cast of characters is large.

If I were to list all of the people who have influenced and inspired me the list would be much longer. Instead, I will attempt to acknowledge the people who directly impacted this story, starting chronologically as the tale unfolds.

First I want to mention Tim Cusack, without whom I would not have been able to start JP Gotrock- exactly the right musician at the right time. Tim is still performing with Andy Russo in a duo around the Monmouth County area so I urge you to go out and listen to this phenomenally talented singer-guitarist who has been such a great friend to me also.

Our first bass player Chris Spiewak was recently married, and I was honored to perform at his wedding- best of luck to both of you guys!

Our first drummer John Fitzpatrick still performs from time to time and also DJs. Last I heard he is living in Florida and also doing some DJing on the side.

My good friends from Nightwing deserve a mention- Sal Tortomasi, Bobby D'onofrio, Pete Digiovanni and the others. Bobby also performs with me in Chik-A-Boom, whose web site is here:

<http://home.comcast.net/~chikaboom/>

and he actually came up with the name the Hot Dog House, one night during a visit from the Aquarian magazine.

Stagefrights original members, Kevin Kavanaugh, Alan Harper, and Hank Shroeder all deserve a mention- if not for them allowing me to sit in with them I would never have gotten the idea for JP Gotrock.

Which brings me to my friends Mark Fuhring and John Lopez, who influenced me musically from my youth on through to my Rutgers days. John (who also happens to be Vini's cousin) is the person who actually gave JP Gotrock its name, based on a character from The Flintstones.

David Shearn has been gone 20 years this summer and I miss him more than ever. Had he lived he would certainly have taken his place amongst the greatest pianists in rock music, as it was he certainly was the greatest I will ever perform with.

Neal Schwartz actually showed up at the Boathouse in Belmar a few weeks back and jammed with me and Chik-A-Boom on several songs- great to know he is still performing.

Don Erdman is still singing in around the Union County NJ area, just heard him perform at at benefit a little over a year ago and he still sounds great.

Vini Lopez is of course the world famous original drummer from the E-Street Band, and you can still see him perform in his latest band Steel Mill Retro, who also have just released their second album:

<http://www.steelmillretro.com/>

Big Danny Gallagher passed away in 2007 and left a legacy of music and love and four great kids. His album "Don't Stop The Dreamin'" was released in 1993 and is available from his tribute site here:

<http://www.BigDannyGallagher.com>

Vinnie Roslin still performs- just saw him a few weeks ago at a local jam session. Vinnie and I played together in several other bands after JP Gotrock folded, including Big Danny's various lineups and some projects with Helyn Chrobocinski and me.

Billy and Ruth Smith of the Asbury Rock and Roll Museum are living in Florida, I hear and I want to thank them and their friend Steve Bumball for all of their support at all those great gigs.

Steve Schraeger can be found still keeping that great patented "Schrebs Beat" behind Bocci and the Bad Boys, whose web site is here:

<http://www.boccigalupe.com/>

Both Frankie Lee and Sonny Rhodes still perform:

<http://www.frankieleeblues.com>

<http://www.reverbNation.com/sonnyrhodes>

And I do want to thank all of my friends and supporters who have encouraged me to "Don't Stop The Dreaming", helping me to remember the great people and times I have had and also inspired me to continue to make music.

Web Sites

There are many books out on the history of Asbury Park's music scene. One of the best also happens to have a picture of JP Gotrock on page 101:

<http://www.njrockmap.com>

The Stone Pony is still going strong and the music sounds better than ever now that redevelopment has arrived:

<http://www.StonePonyOnline.com>

And the Court Tavern, greatly remodeled and enlarged since we first pounded its walls can still be found at the corner of Spring and Court Streets in New Brunswick and here:

<http://www.myspace.com/thecourttavernnj>

There is a great Facebook group called "Remembering The Circuit In Asbury Park NJ" which is run by my old friend Ken Wescott from back in the day.

And several Asbury Park tribute sites around the internet:

<http://www.beyondthepalace.com/>
<http://www.asburyboardwalk.com/>
<http://www.palaceamusements.com/>

Here is a great Mrs Jays tribute site up on MySpace:

<http://www.myspace.com/mrsjays>

and both MySpace and Facebook have various venue and tribute sites related to the store told here.

Monmouth County Friends Of Clearwater is now NJ Friends Of Clearwater:

<http://www.McClearwater.org>

And last but not least I want to thank my wife Denise, who has put up with all this music and all of this dreaming for all of these years.

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