

Trailside Rangers — On the Road with a Promise and a Prayer, A Tour Diary

story · February 18, 2001

Prologue

11/19/99

The date on which our diary begins and the tone is set for what the reader can expect to be enlightened about.

Midnight. I'm sitting in the Iowa City bus depot. Next to me is a scruffy old man munching on a bag of Cheetos. His boots are caked with mud. He is wearing one of those old goosedown jackets and it has a big rip in the arm. I wonder if he is just waiting for the bus or just in here to stay warm. He doesn't look like the serial killer type. You might think Iowa doesn't have serial killers. You're wrong. You might think Iowa doesn't have homeless people. You're wrong. You might think that people from Iowa are all nice. You're wrong. You probably don't believe Iowa has a very strong music scene. You're right. That's why I'm on my way to New York to hook up with my band-mates Rowan, Jason and our new bass player J.T.

We are going on a tour of the northeast early next year. I will be keeping a diary of the trip and this is the first entry. In a nutshell: Cheeto-guy, bus depot, cold, lots of gear/baggage.

We will be spending the next month and a half rehearsing, taking off sometime after the first of the year.

I expect the trip to be full of characters like the Cheeto-guy, the atmospheres to be as intriguing as the bus depot and the weather to get colder.

I expect to relate stories of how shitty it is being an under-appreciated group of musicians who want nothing more than to share their songs with the world. It is an old story and one that has been told many times. But all good stories are worth repeating and since I've never had a chance to be the yarn spinner, I promise it will be fresh.

I expect that during the next 3 months each of us band members will at times love and hate one another.

For sure they are going to hate me because I'm going to be able to vent my frustrations on this web-site, and I don't plan on holding back. I want to 'keep it real' as the overused saying goes. However, no one is stopping them from posting their diaries either so maybe we'll see some sparks fly.

I expect the music to be heavy, forged with passion, have dynamic peaks and valleys and reduce the commonplace scene to ashes.

I expect this will be difficult, but a hell of a lot of fun.

Here comes my bus.

On the road with A Promise and A Prayer — The Trailside Rangers TOUR 2001

- Friday 01/05 New Brunswick NJ
- Saturday 01/06 Trenton NJ
- Sunday 01/07 Wilmington DE
- Monday 01/08 Waterbury CT
- Tuesday 01/09 day off
- Wednesday 01/10 Worcester MA
- Thursday 01/11 Springfield MA
- Friday 01/12 Albany NY
- Saturday 01/13 Saracuse NY
- Sunday 01/14 Youngstown OH
- Monday 01/15 Pittsburgh PA
- Tuesday 01/16 Cincinnati OH
- Wednesday 01/17 Detroit MI
- Thursday 01/18 day off
- Friday 01/19 Chicago IL
- Saturday 01/20 Muncie IN
- Sunday 01/21 Green Bay WI
- Monday 01/22 Minneapolis MN
- Tuesday 01/23 day off
- Wednesday 01/24 Madison WI
- Thursday 01/25 Urbana IL
- Friday 01/26 Louisville KY
- Saturday 01/27 St Louis MO
- Sunday 01/28 Little Rock AR

- Monday 01/29 Memphis TN
- Tuesday 01/30 Huntsville AL
- Wednesday 01/31 day off
- Thursday 02/01 Birmingham AL
- Friday 02/02 Tallahassee FL
- Saturday 02/03 Savannah GA
- Sunday 02/04 Augusta GA
- Monday 02/05 day off
- Tuesday 02/06 Atlanta GA
- Wednesday 02/07 Nashville TN
- Thursday 02/08 Knoxville TN
- Friday 02/09 Greensboro NC
- Saturday 02/10 Fayetteville NC
- Sunday 02/11 day off
- Monday 02/12 Charlestown WV
- Tuesday 02/13 Norfolk VA
- Wednesday 02/14 Richmond VA
- Thursday 02/15 Washington DC
- Friday 02/16 Philadelphia PA
- Saturday 02/17 New Brunswick NJ
- Sunday 02/18 New York NY

11/22/00 11:30pm

A few uncritical observations set to prose which will hopefully further intrigue the reader as to the nature of the upcoming entries.

Arrived in New York yesterday. It was a long uninspiring bus ride. The landscape was muddy brown and gray, empty fields and silo's all across the Midwest, turning to mountain forests in Pennsylvania. I hope we're not going to play any clubs in Pennsylvania. Cops are all over the place and they look like Tom Berenger in **Platoon**. For this reason I'm imagining Pennsylvania is a lot like Vietnam.

Cheetoh-guy rode all the way to Cleveland sitting right next to me. It turns out he's not homeless, he's a construction worker going home for Thanksgiving. That explains the Cheetos and muddy boots. I worked as a 'framer's helper' for about 2 months when I first came to Iowa. I didn't last long. Basically 'framer's helper' translates into doing shit-ass jobs

you couldn't get a prisoner on a chain gang to do. For that reason I feel sorry for most construction workers I meet. I drive past work sites from time to time on my way to work in the winter. I see them out there, up on forklifts putting in windows fighting the wind, rain and snow. Then I turn the heat up a little higher in my truck and wave as I go by.

Cheetoh-guy was about as interesting as a 2x4. All I wanted to do was read or sleep, but no he kept engaging me in the most inane small talk, even after repeatedly staring blankly out the window silently imploring him to cease and desist. I began to wish he was a serial killer. At the rate we were going he was making me think of murder myself.

When he got off in Cleveland I was relieved. A homie sat next to me after that, baggy pants with his boxers showing, turned-around cap and Tommy Hillfiger coat. He was cool though. He had a CD walkman on, blaring N.W.A. I slept most of the rest of the way here.

I'm crashing at my friend Scott's house now. I'm getting together with Rowan tomorrow for Thanksgiving.

11/24/00 12:45am

On the subject of animal torture, or eating meat, whichever the reader prefers.

Rowan's family had there usual Thanksgiving dinner, complete with all the amenities. I ate with a vengeance. Food on the road is certainly not going to be like this.

Afterwards a friend of ours, Rich, came over and we watched a few videos. We watched *Apocalypse Now*, *The Decline and Fall of Western Civilization*, and all 5 in the *Planet of the Apes* series.

During breaks and rewinds, Rich — who is a vegetarian — discussed with us the rationale behind his diet. I agree with everything he said. Having been raised on a farm I have all too often seen firsthand for myself what cows and pigs have to endure. I remember a course and hardened veterinarian out at our farm, cutting out the ruptured testicles off of a boar. My Father and I were instructed to hold the beast upside down by his back legs while the vet did his work. It wasn't pretty. He didn't even stitch him up afterwards. ('A pig's skin heals rapidly,' was his reply to my questioning it.) And all the time, throughout my visible disgust at having to participate in this event, my Dad kept saying: "Relax, he doesn't feel it." I heard that quite a bit growing up. As if animals don't have the same set of nerve endings and could never feel pain. I can tell you the hog was certainly not squealing in celebration of a glorious albeit short life. I have witnessed much animal abuse — some on our farm but

mostly on others in the area. Farmers who make a healthy living are only concerned about the welfare of an animal to the point of it bringing them in a good profit. Anything above and beyond that in the way of a creature's quality of life simply doesn't matter. The irony in this is that I still find myself eating meat on a regular basis. Some day I will find the resolve to rectify this and become a vegetarian like Rich. There are some people that waver in a gray area of compromise and claim not to eat meat — (or more specifically, *red* meat) but still eat chicken, fish, cheese and drink milk — as if milking doesn't involve harming the cow. If they only knew. A milk cow is kept constantly pregnant, in cramped quarters hooked up to a machine. It's calf is utilized for veal, and when the cow no longer provides adequate quantities of milk, it is sold for hamburger. For this reason, perhaps a day will come when I will have the discipline to become vegan. However, that will not be until long after this tour. We'll eat what we can get and be happy about it. Even at the expense of our mammalian brethren.

I admire Rich.

11/27/00

Various clever notations and comparisons made regarding band members Bishop and Graveside.

Rowan and I discussed the rehearsal schedule. It is rigorous. We have rented out a room at Ultra Sound for the whole month of December. Jeff gave us a good deal since we've rehearsed there for so many years, so we can pretty much go in anytime between 10am to 12am.

Rowan will not be going on tour, he will be running the Jericho Hill records label and keeping the web-site updated. In place of him is our old ally, John Graveside. I like him for the most part, but he's a little weird. He was in a few bands like "Wicked Harvest" and "The Big Book." They had this heavy, sludgy, rust metal-goth sound. I think one of their big hits was: "Black Acid Vampire Girl," or something close to that. John and Rowan grew up playing guitar together in that stuffy Westfield scene. Egads. How did they make it through growing up in a town with as many cliques and spoiled backbiting pompous ass clowns as Beverly Hills? Therapy and prescription pills, that's how. (As the lyric goes.) *(Editor's note: ref. Seven Percent Solution.)* I am as confident in Graveside's playing as I am in Rowan's, though Rowan is truly the only guitarist I could work with *creating* new material.

I once said in a college radio interview at Rutgers University that Rowan is to the Trailside Rangers what Johnny Marr is to the Smiths. I don't think anyone really 'got' that comment. I guess you have to like the Smiths for one thing and everyone in the studio must not have. If you do like the Smiths, you can see that the comment is quite a compliment. Those bozos whose radio program it was didn't have clue about much more than beer anyway. Not that beer is a bad thing, but they cut off 'Red Willow' in the quiet part because they thought the song was over. That's inexcusable whether you drink Guinness or not.

11/28/00

Which notably outlines the cast and characters of this epic diary.

The Play Begins

Title: Trailside Rangers tour of 2001 — on the road with a Promise and a Prayer

Cast of Characters:

- **Rowan Bishop** — Guitarist, vocalist, songwriter. Honest to the point of rudeness, driven, hardnosed, devoted. Original member not touring. Opting to stay behind and run struggling record label, Jericho Hill. Influences: King Diamond, Iron Maiden, Husker Du.
- **Jason Byrne** — Drummer extraordinaire. Cranky, moody, sensitive, and well educated. Influences: Buddy Rich, Keith Moon, Neil Peart. Also plays trumpet. Not your typical drummer in that he uses his extensive jazz background to compliment the Rangers songs into an atypical format.
- **John Graveside** — Guitar, vocals. Emotional, slightly unstable, pale, fascinated with death and the symbolism of the White Whale in *Moby Dick*. Influences: Death metal, thrash, *Moby Dick*.
- **JT** — Bass, background vocals. Young, rambunctious, free thinker, pot smoker. An avid jazz fan, especially fond of Miles Davis' *Bitches Brew* CD.
- **Duane Larson** — Bass, Minister of Attitude. Loyal and dedicated — nearly to a fault. Lives and breathes to play live and bring 'the vision' to the people. Master orchestrator of the peaks and valleys dynamic of the band. Influences: The Beatles, The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Jam, The Police, The Replacements. Believes the band's name should incorporate "The" as part of its official title, but that won't happen.
- **Joe Wilford** — Vocals, guitar, songwriter. So that this is a fair representation of myself, I will ask one of my band-mates to fill this in.

Joe is a selfish, narrow-minded, strong-willed SOB who seems to always get his way. On top

of that, he is just a so-so guitar player and lyricist. He's always messing up solos and overusing the word "Hell" in his songs. He writes of love, loss and hope over and over and over again. Reads a novel, writes a song. He's so egotistical that he demands that I write more about him so that his paragraph is longer than everyone else's. Other than all that, he's a brilliant musician. Influences: Neil Young, Husker Du, Dylan, Springsteen, The Replacements, The Clash, The False Prophets and Kiss. —John Graveside

12/01/00

Regarding the difficulties faced when brushing off the dust after a long absence from playing.

First day of rehearsal was a disaster. Everyone was late which was no surprise. But our new bass player JT did not show up until 4 hours later than the rest of us. By then, we were all quite pissed-off and bored at having nothing to do but diddle around, each of us trying to play louder than the other. Drummers always seem to have a knack for pounding on the toms just as your kneeling down beside them tuning your guitar.

We cursed out JT, called him an amateur, told him this was the opportunity of a lifetime and not to fuck it up, told him to stop smoking so much dope, shape up and go get us all some sandwiches at the local deli. He did. Later on, we played three sets of material, old and new 2 times each. My fingertips felt like they were immersed in hot candle wax. My voice cracked, broke, and was buried under the onslaught of guitars turned up way too high and drums feeling the aggression of a man that is fighting like hell to keep from being molded by society but losing the battle.

This is usually the way that first rehearsals go after a long absence. It's as though each member of the band is shouting out "Listen to me! Listen to me!" No one was listening or trying to listen to anybody but themselves. Bands suck when they do that. We were no different. We really sucked. But it needed to happen. If we did it just right, (which means horribly) we will each realize how bad we sounded and how un-fun and un-productive the rehearsal was. Then we will move on. Sometimes it takes many rehearsals to conquer this demon. I don't think it will take us that long. That's how bad it was.

12/02/00

Concerning the inter-band politics of trash-talking and it's relation to food.

I was wrong. We were still bad today. Although we made some strides in the first few hours,

as the night went on the demons returned, with a vengeance. It's too early to tell, but it seems that the crack in the armor is JT. He is a great bass player, but he's still playing for a different band, even though he is in the same room with us. As Rowan would say: "He doesn't have the vision yet." We sent him out for sandwiches again and discussed this behind his back. If you are in a band and get sent for sandwiches or step out to use the bathroom, you can be sure your band-mates are plotting your demise. Or at least trash talking about you.

12/03/00

Which touches briefly on one of the most important and key elements that will ever be discussed in the scope of this document.

The Vision:

Rowan has always had a vision of what the Trailside Rangers should be. I don't know the details of it, I don't even think it is something tangible. But we all must have it or the music suffers. I will ask Rowan to write me down his version of the 'vision'.

To me, it is the glue that fills the voids and cracks of our musical differences. It is what joins and bonds that sculpture that would never be, could never be the same without it. I will write more of the vision later, as it comes to me.

As of right now, the vision is blurry. The long hiatus has dulled our senses, but the deli sandwiches are still good.

12/08/00

A brief summary concerning the process of molding a song.

Worked on new material for a change of pace. It didn't go too badly but the functionality of the band is not what it used to be. I remember walking into rehearsal at one time, playing a new song for the guys and then being able to hammer through 3 or 4 takes of it before taking a break. Just that fast. Everyone usually adds their own creative spin on the song and then molds it to the whole. From there it's just a matter of working out the small (but important) details and that just comes with time. In most cases it was Rowan giving Jason suggestions on where to use double-time, or use the ride more, etc. Today we just sort of slugged through it, as though the new song was like knee-deep mud sucking our shoes off at each step.

12/11/00

A short comment on JT about which the reader may or may not be interested in.

I have to give JT credit. He is the new guy in the band and therefore gets the most shit. He is the gopher, the dooper, the heel. But so far he has adjusted well. (He is only 20 after all.) I noticed he's not screwing up our deli orders as much anymore.

12/12/00

Regarding the initiation of JT to the band.

JT yelled his first obscenity at the 'Pizza Guy' on the corner. He has been christened. I think it was something like: "Your pizza sucks! I hear you cut the ears off homeless people in place of pepperoni."

It was a little brutal but effective.

12/13/00

Concerning the relationship of sports to the success of a band, which will serve as an example to the reader as to the innate cleverness of this diary's author.

I cannot express how important having a healthy relationship with your band-mates is to the material you produce as a whole. I have decided that this is the reason for our lack of sharpness and cohesiveness. It is not that we are technically out of practice. Most of these songs are like a bicycle, just get on and pedal your ass off, soon you'll be flying down the road. But a band takes a 'team effort' as much as I hate to use that cliché. The analogy, however is apropos: It's all about execution, taking the shot or passing off, and mostly it's about knowing where each of your teammates are on the floor without having to look. We aren't there yet, but the time we have spent together has allowed us to build back those relationships that have been neglected. We have made more progress eating sandwiches from the deli than by plowing through the set lists. It's the sitting down and talking, it's the laughing and joking and making fun of each other that seals the cracks of time and enables each of us to focus on the 'vision.'

12/15/00

Which denotes the improvement of band member relations.

We all decided it was time to take a break for a few days. Two weeks straight of 4-6 hour

rehearsals daily have taken their toll. None of us has any doubt that though we are not nearly ready for this tour, things will fall into place as long as we don't panic. We are, after all, supposed to be having fun. It was a good time to break since we were all getting on so well. When we come back to rehearse again on Wednesday things should start to click.

12/20/00

Concerning a few simple observations that occurred on this day, that are summed up almost in as many words as this introduction to the entry.

Things went better today. I broke a string, John had a hangover, JT wasn't stoned, Jason was in a bad mood and *it didn't matter.* We still played better than we have been.

12/21/00

Regarding some obligatory band silliness that was present due to the festive holiday spirit of the band members.

Spent a majority of the rehearsal playing with Jeff's train set and reading the numerous X-mas cards he gets from other struggling bands like ours. We even helped him decorate a little Charlie Brown like Christmas tree. Flirted with the idea of doing that Heat/Snow miser song from "Year Without a Santa Clause" but then other song suggestions popped up until we were each arguing the case for 6 different ones. Democracy in a band is not always the most productive way of making decisions, as I'm sure you will see in this diary.

We decided a snowball fight would settle this matter. Then there was the problem of the snow: There was none. I said that we wouldn't have that problem had we decided to rehearse in Iowa. I hear it's something like 5 below zero there now with the wind chill at 43 below. Who says global warming is a bad thing? We decided to leave early and verbally assault the pizza guy.

12/22/00

In which adjectives and analogies are piled so high the reader may become airsick.

We are starting to sound like a band again. My fingers have stopped hurting, my voice has stopped breaking. The solos are soaring within the songs like a raven through a canyon. John G. is picking up the harmonies like a choirboy. His guitar playing is precise, excising riffs like scars into the music. JT is settling into a deep, growling, belly of the beast groove. Jason is methodically rhythmic, mixing his chaotic spontaneity with rock solid disposition.

We are still scouring away the rust, but the oilcan is at hand and the tin man band dubbed the Trailside Rangers is beginning to come to life once again. The Yellow Brick Road awaits...

12/29/00

Regarding the final rehearsal and some high-brow commentary on the approach the band will take upon execution of the tour.

The last rehearsal. I swear that some of the best performances thus far in the existence of the Trailside Rangers have been right inside this very room. It's a shame but I believe it to be true. We only have each other to play for and there are no distractions in the foam-padded interior, consequently 'The Vision' remains intact. We will endeavor to achieve this pinnacle on the stages of the clubs on this tour. We shall not let the dim lighting, the smoke, the uneven and unstable stages, (probably held up by milk crates) distract us. We will try not to let the crowd influence us, either by their enthusiasm or apathy. We will not let the shabby dives and pits they call clubs bring us down to their dank, greasy, beer-stench level. Neither will the booking agents of these places, try as they might, succeed in suffocating our will, though they will certainly rip us off at every opportunity, make us wait and wait and wait, order us around as though they were doing us a favor by letting us play in their dumpy joint, and further vex us in any way they can so that we do not feel as though we have any talent to play anywhere else but on the rotted-out platform they call a stage. First stop: New Brunswick, New Jersey.

1/4/01

Which amply describes the unsightly vehicle being relied upon for transportation during the length of the tour.

We have rented a boxy, old orange van from rent-a-wreck, a place that really lives up to it's name. We'll be fortunate to make it across state lines in this heap. It's an Econoline, but I'm certain it won't get more than 8 miles to the gallon. The tires are bald and blue smoke billows out of the tailpipe like a smokestack. The seats are ripped and the foam in them is crumbling like feta-cheese. The brakes are bad and the engine has a bad knock. It squeaks and rattles, pings and chugs and otherwise sounds like a sewing machine in a laundry-mat dryer. Beyond that it smells like a combination of rust and mold with a bit of BO thrown in for good measure. In short, it shows all the signs of being a well-seasoned miniature tour bus and we love it. It fits all the gear and all of us, 2 sit comfortably in the front and the

unlucky other 2 get to make their seats the amps and gig bags. We will split the driving duties but I suspect John or I will be driving most of the time. Jason doesn't have a license and JT makes everybody nervous behind the wheel. Rowan has happily made all the motel arrangements and has provided us with maps of the best routes. He also has packed everything accordingly as if he expects any of us to remember what order all the gear goes into the van. Everyone is giddy and gleeful, excited about hitting the road and the possibilities.

1/5/01

The first of two summaries concerning the nature of booking agents which will be touched on in greater detail later on in our epic adventure.

New Brunswick is a college town with lots of cool little bars and an active music scene. We ate at a pizza place (there's no place in the world that has pizza as good as NJ) after unloading all the gear. We have played at this place before so we're familiar with the routine. Load all your shit into a corner and wait until the band playing before you gets off the stage. Load in time is usually around 7 or 8 and the first band doesn't usually start until 9:30. "Nocturnal Emissions" is the first band, followed by us and then some washed out hippie from a 70's band that you wish you never heard of in the first place. Which brings to mind my first bone of contention when gigging. The guys booking these places put very little effort into lining up bands of the same genre and or caliber. We could be playing with a country band one night and a punk band the next followed by a metalhead group, and so on. The booking agents who do try to match up the talent are doing everyone a favor because everyone wins; the club, the people who paid 10 bucks to get in, and the bands themselves. Imagine going to see your favorite local rock band and being forced to endure 45 minutes of industrial noise by "Johnny Buzzsaw and the Flint-rock Sparks". Then after seeing the band you came to see another version of the above takes the stage prompting you to get the hell out while you still have eardrums. While in contrast, if bands of similar music styles are on the same bill, you might hang around and have another Guinness. Due to the immense number of bands and varieties of music I understand that this is not possible all the time. I only ask that booking agents try to do this, so people don't pay a 10-dollar cover to see 45 minutes of some band they like and 90 minutes of a band they hate. I'm sure this is a topic I will touch on more later, because it's bound to be an issue throughout the tour.

1/6/01 2:45am

Reflections on the first performance of the tour of which our reader is most certainly

curious about.

I'm writing this on a 3-legged table in the room of some roach infested motel on Route 1 and 9. I'm sharing the place with John and he is watching some bad movie, I think "Children Shouldn't Play with Dead things." He digs that kinda stuff. The first gig went well I guess. I think we were a little over-anxious and came out all siren's on and bursting at the seams with chaotic energy. This happens from time to time particularly when we are well rehearsed and haven't played in front of a crowd in a while. It was a great crowd that turned out, a lot of friends of ours in this area seeing us off. Sometimes you can feed off the energy of the crowd but in this case we didn't need any more energy, we could have played to the bar maid a cocktail waitress and the local drunk and still rocked the house. We have rehearsed a month inside a 20 x 20 gray foam padded room with no audience but ourselves — it felt great to break out and rock for some people, however the adrenaline rush overcame us. Jason played too fast as he is wont to do when excited and the rest of us fell in as though it was all okay. Because of this the mistakes started to multiply in size from slight to glaring. I don't think anyone minded though, it has been a long time since the Rangers rocked.

We opened with **Buffalo Hurricane**, which went over really well, even though John didn't shut off his distortion pedal while picking some minor ninths. Rowan has told him again and again, "If you play minor ninths without turning off the distortion no one will hear them." Despite the fact no one heard them the song was about our strongest of the night. I think we should've paced ourselves a bit though. By the time we got to the set closer, **Flamingo Johnny** we sounded like a different band. Good, but different and the Vision was blurred. It was uncharacteristically sloppy. **Celebration** as an encore always works well no matter how we are playing and this case was no different. Even the most haphazard version of Celebration seems to work. We needed this show in a bad way, so as to help fine tune us for the road ahead, where the crowds, bars and pizza joints will be unknown to us.

1/6/01 2:00pm

Which briefly describes a memory that took place at an earlier time in the authors life.

Just down the Turnpike a bit is our next stop, Trenton. It is another old haunt of ours while still a fledgling band, although the clubs we frequented were ones where we were in the audience not on the stage. I remember seeing Billy Bragg here years ago with Michelle Shocked. There were young punks running amok in the crowd wearing t-shirts with swastika's on them. It was a little scary. The bathroom tile had holes the size of jackboots.

That was in the late 80's. I can only wonder what it must look like today.

1/7/01 3:00am

Concerning the band's rivalry and disappointment with another band of the same ilk.

I'm happy with tonight's show. We were solid, throughout. I think we have burned off all the nervous energy that has been building up. The dive we played has hardly changed. The holes in the bathroom tile and in the walls are the size of people's heads now. The line up of bands was decent. The crowd was civil and not at all violent as is normal for this place. "Honky Tonk Nightmare" opened up, then "Sidesaddle" (an all girl band) followed by us and then our old friends the "Barnburners." They had broken up and formed another band after a disagreement with Bob Stormcrow their lead guitarist. But after doing their own things for a while they came back to what was real. Bands are like old girlfriends in a lot of ways. You're in love, out of love, out of town, but you miss the sex, then you miss the company and soon you're back in the sack. It was like that with the Barnburners. I was sad when they broke up. They are just too damn good to break up. Although they didn't thank us on their last CD, (we always mentioned them on ours) which pissed us off, they still are the best band to play on the same bill as us. They usually are the only band that can keep up with us, in fact they occasionally blew us off the stage in the past. Tonight we smoked their barrel. Ed said he thought they would be joining us later in the tour for a few dates. I know he wants to even the score.

1/8/01 12:30am

Regarding the difficulty of maintaining one's individuality amongst those of a less refined persuasion without getting beaten up.

Where the hell is Delaware? I haven't seen a real house since I've been here. Only trailer courts and shit. This bar we played in wasn't too bad but the clientele left a little to be desired. I thought they might start hurling beer bottles at John. Not because they thought we sounded bad, I think it was just that John has this look about him. He's too gothic to be hanging around these parts. They left him alone, but probably only because they thought he would work some voodoo on them. One thing about John, he is a lot like Rowan in that nothing fazes him. In fact he plays better just when you think he might buckle. I admire that.

Jason is settling down into a nice groove with JT. All of us are really in tune with each other as far as playing together. I can't think of one song in the set that went poorly. The locals seemed to come around when we played "Heaven Tonight" but then frowned on "Promise

and Prayer" during the loud, balls out chorus. Can't please everybody, but I swear a couple of those rednecks feet were still tapping even as they talked us down.

Thursday 01/11/01, Springfield MA

Concerning the modest sleeping arrangements when on tour without a pot to piss in.

Staying at Rowan's humble pad for this stop on the tour. Our motel dates will be limited from here on out, as our budget does not constitute privacy of any kind. We will sleep on floors, couches, in vehicles, pretty much wherever or whoever is available. There are kind folks on the road who don't mind letting a few clumsy, poor musicians grab a few hours of shut-eye as long as we promise not to steal anything. When there are no kind folks or no floors or couches to sleep on, the van will have to do. This is but one sacrifice on the long list, but it is a big one. You don't miss your own bed...until about the 3rd day of hoping the floor you're going to be sleeping on has carpeting.

Saturday 01/13/01, Syracuse NY

Which ponders a major difficulty known to most original bands.

Rowan has no hometown influence. The shows in Massachusetts were great shows, but it seems everyone was in a bar down the street where a local band was playing "classic rock" covers. We took a break and heard "Take it Easy" wafting down the alley. We knew right then no one else was coming out on a school-night to check out great new music. Hang on to that old crap for all it's worth. Bastards. Maybe it's not just that Rowan has no influence. We all spend so much time trying to make it in this business that our social life suffers. Our friends are few.

01/18/01, day off

Which relates an astute reflection made during arguably one of the best rock and roll movies ever made about life on the road.

Now I know what Robbie Robertson means when he says in *The Last Waltz*, "It's a goddamned impossible way of life." We have played in a different city every night for 8 straight days. It feels like 6 months. The wear and tear is showing. We argue, we fight, we don't talk much except to bitch. McGillicuddy is annoying, Graveside won't shut up with his analysis of everything, JT rambles like a dead-head on brown acid and I begin to wonder where the fame and glory are for a band that is busting their asses like ours is. I would settle

for just the glory but there is none of that either. Tomorrow is a 'big' show in Chicago. We took the day today to check out downtown Chicago's local music scene. Not surprisingly, it sucks.

01/19/01

Concerning a turning point in the road during our journey on the road having to do with bass players.

This show was a relief. It reminded us that there are some folks who do "get" our music. It was an enthusiastic and appreciative crowd. Even though most were there to see the band after us, they did seem to enjoy the Trailside Rangers. The only downside was the ever-increasing hostility between Jason and JT. They are not grooving like they should, each is trying to musically control/influence the other. I'm rather concerned about JT's abuse of chemicals. He simply cannot drink without getting absolutely fall-down, pass-out drunk. While he is not yet endangering our performances, I feel it's just a matter of time. Quite frankly we are just damn tired of having to carry his drunk ass out to the van every night. If it was possible to leave him, we would. Then of course we'd be without a bass player though. Although our old friend Duane did take the 5-hour drive from Iowa City just to check us out tonight here in Chicago. Hmm. He plays bass. It was good to see him and he did seem a little jealous that it was not him up there playing bass. Jason loves Duane, but then again, Jason knows he can control Duane.

01/20/01

A terse diatribe on the low likability factor of some cities on the tour.

It's little shit-ass towns like this (Muncie, Indiana) that make me wonder if it's really worth it to do all this touring. America is beautiful, but it does have its share of pockmarks and this town is one of them. Right up there with Elizabeth, New Jersey. No, Elizabeth is like a raised, infected boil. Anyway this leg of the tour we could've skipped.

01/21/01

Regarding facts that become evident after a short time on the road when trying to ascend the slippery temple of fame and fortune. These and other reflections the author has dutifully noted for the reader.

Some points to remember if you ever go on tour: 1) The food is bad. Always. There's only

so much McDonalds and BK that a person can take before they begin craving anything home-cooked. 2) There is no one to express your thoughts/feelings to. Your band-mates are in the same predicament, they don't want to hear it. Everyone else is a stranger. 3) There is virtually no time for anything but traveling, loading and unloading, playing and leaving. If you want to take a walk; forget it. If you want to be alone; just try. It's exhausting in that you put forth so much effort just to be able to play for an hour or so, when you finally get to that point, yeah, it's good but there's no time to reflect on the beauty of that moment. I thought keeping a diary would be helpful. But re-reading it, the shows all seem to melt together, memories intermingle with others and events become inaccurate, distorted. I realize now, that this diary may fail to do what I had intended it to do. Or maybe the picture it paints will be not what I intended, but simply to be looked upon for what it is.

01/23/01

In which the stage is set (so to speak) for a great adventure to occur after which the direction of the band and this narrative will noticeably change.

Green Bay and Minneapolis were terrific shows in that we played with a passion that seems to exist for us (at this point) only on stage. The crowds were both appreciative and receptive. This little hub of the Midwest has the distinct charm of musical open-mindedness amongst it's inhabitants. Even JT's drunkenness was not a problem in this case. Maybe the fans were reminded of their hometown favs the *Replacements*. Whatever the case it has become clear to Jason, Graveside and myself that JT needs a *replacement*. We are not concerned about JT's abilities as a musician, we are concerned he will simply go too far at some point and we will lose not only him but the rest of the tour dates because of his chemical abuse. Contrary to popular opinion, some people don't perform better under the influence. He is no Jimi Hendrix. I have made the call to Duane and offered him the gig. We bought JT a bus ticket and plan on making the break tonight. Duane will meet us in Madison. I am extremely worried about how JT will take this news. Despite what we know has to be done, this will not be easy. He is our friend and deserves to be treated with respect and consideration even in light of his irresponsibility. I know of some bands that have been in situations like this and have simply pulled the rug out from under a member. But that's typically behavior exemplified by the very corporate record company bigwigs we deplore. I will not play hatchet man. However, I can't see JT taking this very well at all.

01/25/01

Regarding a series of bizarre events strung together which may in fact be regarded in this

history as apocryphal or at the very least most certainly exaggerated for the benefit of the reader.

Chaos and rock 'n roll are as good together as Jack and Coke. In the span of 2 days we have been on a carnival ride that has no equal in it's nauseating ability to make us cringe and grab our guts screaming for it to end but knowing deep inside we didn't really want it to. If we could, we'd get back in line and do it all over again.

We broke the news to JT the other night as planned. He was way more composed and calm than I ever could have expected. He took it extremely well. I remember him nodding his head while listening to me explain what the band had decided. When I finished he pushed his glasses up and walked out of the room. He was quiet and sober that night. His bus was leaving the next morning. He was all packed up and I took him to breakfast first thing. We had a perfectly normal conversation over our bacon and eggs. I dropped him off at the station and waited for him to board the bus. I even made sure that bus was on its way down the highway before I left. JT didn't even oppose the idea of letting Duane use his amp, (since it would be impossible for JT to take it home at this point). All was proceeding so smoothly that I wondered if this was simply the calm before the storm. We soon found out that it was.

That night in Madison we took the stage at around 11pm. We had an impromptu run through rehearsal with Duane that afternoon. Of course he was rusty but we would have to make due. The club was jammed, although I'm sure it was not to see us but another more popular band with a "buzz" in this town. The only buzz we were a part of was coming out of our amplifiers when the stage lights came on. We started the show with "Opaque" a song ironically, about Duane. (The names were changed to avoid controversy in the band but since we are swirling about in it now, it doesn't really matter.)

We knocked down song after song in the set list until some over-zealous fan decided it was time to stage dive. The over-zealous fan turned out to be JT. I didn't realize it until he had pitched Duane headfirst into the front row, bass and all, his amp yanked to the floor via the bass cable still attached. I could see the deliberate fury in JT's eyes as he headed for his next victim, Graveside. John, however, anticipated this at once upon seeing Duane's untimely center stage exit, and hurled himself headfirst into the drum kit, thinking to position himself behind the biggest guy in the band, Jason, as protection. He split an eyebrow on a cymbal before landing in Jason's lap. Jason was still oblivious to what was happening and didn't actually stop playing but for the 3 or so beats that landed on Graveside's head and shoulders.

McGillicuddy is like that, no matter what the situation, he just keeps playing. He shrugged Graveside off to the side and continued the song right where he left off.

At this point JT was heading for me and I could see that there was going to be no way to diffuse the situation short of us all being humiliated by being beaten up on stage. It was only instinct and self-preservation that made me un-sling my guitar and take the "batter up" position. I remember shattering a stage lamp overhead while waving the Ibanez overhead. As glass rained down on me so did good fortune. Another fan, obviously an avid stage diver as well, saw JT's rampage as a call to arms and set out to top him. Duane had just been helped to his feet when the stranger launched JT over his head, effectively throwing him farther and completing the competition but not before diving headfirst into the crowd himself. The audience reaction was one part fear, one part excitement, one part confusion and two parts completely enthralled.

Dazed, I took a second to look at the situation and saw that things had taken a odd twist. JT and our stage diving hero who followed him, were being escorted out of the club by all the available bouncers who probably were about to toss us as well, but were too busy. Duane managed to straggle back onstage, right his amp/gear, plug in and resume playing, casting a few weary glances my way. Graveside followed suit, realizing what good theatre blood cascading down your face is. He kept playing from behind the drum-set though, close to Jason. I plugged back in, stepped up to the mic and since the show had taken a turn in a Spinal-Tappish direction, shouted out the only appropriate thing I could think of to keep the show going: "MADISON!! LET ME SEE YOUR LIGHTERS UP IN THE AIR!!! SCREAM FOR ME MAIN STREET!!!"

The moshers seemed to take this as their cue, having been fueled by the dramatic events. We have never really inspired true moshing until now. We had been three-quarters through "Three Days" when the melee began. The instrumental chorus of the song lent itself quite nicely to the now swirling pit of moshers who now seemed to think that the blood was all part of the show. Our set completed only after multiple encores and John's nearly passing out from loss of blood. The communication that took place onstage between the 4 of us as we continued the show despite nearly being shutdown, sight unseen, was amazing. We were the closest, tightest, most cohesive unit that we had ever been and probably will ever be. Adversity brought out the pure desire that fuels that weapon of creation and passion we sometimes fail to fully unleash on our audiences.

The band that everyone was there to see found themselves in the uncompromising position

of having a difficult if not impossible act to follow. We couldn't stick around to find out. The management of the club wanted compensation for the damage. Not only did they withhold our pay, but also wanted an additional sum to cover their "costs". Typical club owners. They could keep our pay, the amount was surely not worth what we had just experienced. As we were packing up one of the club goons joined us onstage and said smugly, "I've seen *The Who* do that before."

That night, we parked the van in under an overpass on the interstate. For the first time on the whole tour we actually found solace in each other's company. We talked most of the night, finally giving in to the sleep of the dead.

The day after that

In which a break in the narrative history takes place for quite some time due to events which will shortly be revealed whereby at long last the tour diary is reprinted and recounted in it's full glory; unabridged and unapologetic in it's acerbic albeit entertaining nature notwithstanding the wordy and inflated entry summaries.

Editor's note: It is at this point that the tour diary entries abruptly stopped coming in to Rowan back at the home office of Jericho Hill Records, who had been publishing them online. It was not immediately known why but later determined that it was due to the loss of Joe's laptop computer — which was apparently stolen. The lack of band funds did not allow for a replacement to be purchased. Subsequently, Joe had to resort to writing out the entries by hand in a notebook. When the tour completed, the task to decipher the handwriting and transfer it to soft copy for web-publication was cumbersome at best — and it was something that Joe, exhausted from months of life on the road, (poor baby) did not wish to immediately undertake. Thus, the tour diary entries were canned — it was assumed they would never make it online.

However, Joe has now provided the missing entries — albeit years later — which are published here for the first time at the new homepage of the Trailside Rangers, Art Never Dies, as the Jericho Hill Records web-site has sadly gone the way of the dodo.

Editor's note: Joe Wilford is the editor. He is me. Therefore I will now quit writing editor's notes in the third person as though Joe Wilford is someone else. It is pertinent to note that Rowan Bishop played the part of the editor in the first batch of entries — though his notes don't appear in this online version. I don't think either of us saved a copy with those intact.

Editor's note: This will be the last editor's note for awhile. I will let the road documentation

speaking for itself. However, I feel it pertinent to mention how surprised I was at the popularity of aforementioned tour diary entries. Rowan raved over them and hounded me to keep them coming as soon as they were penned, which I was able to do via email until the laptop suddenly disappeared one night. There was never any evidence of a theft other than the fact that my computer was just gone. (Read more details of this in the entries to follow.) While I liked keeping a journal of our adventures on the road, I entertained simply dropping it at this point. Rowan vehemently protested, saying that I needed to document the tour for more than just my own personal reasons. He chimed in with: "I am not the only one reading these entries, you know. There's a whole bunch of people that have commented on how much they like them." He made it sound as though I had been writing an online serial — and couldn't let down the avid readers anxiously waiting for the next installment. I made an argument against this — disputing how anyone, much less a stranger, could be so interested in such a personal account of how the Trailside Rangers wallowed through an ill-conceived tour that was going to end up being the swan song of the band's existence. Rowan then admitted that was exactly the point. I recall him saying something to the effect of: "Please just finish this tour diary so I can put the final nail in the coffin of the Trailside Rangers and get on with my life."

So I continued to write. But not for Rowan's immediate sake, because without the computer, I had no way to email the entries back to him. I told him I would keep a notebook journal and transcribe it to soft copy for those 'online faithful' when I returned. I have reneged on that promise until now. (Forgive me, Rowan.) I know it's cliché but, the tour took too much out of me mentally and physically. It was not something I wanted to go back and revel in as soon as I was back home. Then other things became more important. The remaining entries were put aside, forgotten and otherwise gathered dust for years until I began to archive my various musical projects online. It seemed only fitting to include the tour diary here.

But those online faithful may now be asking themselves: **Why?** Oh, avid diary reader, who has patiently waited all these years to read about what obviously turned out to be the demise of the band known as the Trailside Rangers — **why** would Rowan and Joe both make statements predicting the doom of the band before it actually happened?

You see, each of us knew it was coming to an end. We could all feel it. The tour was our last stab at it — but we felt in advance the same as we had all along. People for whatever reason, just didn't share 'the vision' the band did. In effect, the tour was executed as a search to reach out to and find those fans that did share the same vision we did. We found some here and there. And for the most part, folks dug us. But without an assembled militarily

devotional multitude of followers to help us to bring the big picture of the Trailside Rangers to light, we were just another notch in the belt of the overcrowded and highly competitive NYC club-circuit scene, where countless other bands also fell by the wayside on a daily basis. I don't think any of us feel bad about that. Sure, we were disappointed. But we personally saw a number of really great bands (too many to mention) go down the same path to extinction. It's a lonely road paved with broken souls from each new generation, when cold reality finally sets in and slows the bones of the creative protagonist within us. Listen, and you'll still hear the echoes of songs played nevermore, their notes idly bouncing off the grime-slicked walls of dank and sordid bars, nightclubs, rehearsal studios, alleyways and street corners, coffee shops and subway tunnels. Once highly touted CD's now reside in bargain bins or pawnshops or are salvaged only for their jewel cases. Outdated and abused recording equipment is sold cheaply at garage sales or online auctions. Instruments forever entombed in their coffin-like cases, guitar strings corroding away as rapidly as the fleeting memories of a past gone by. Band members slowly lose touch with one another until they have all moved so many times that their numbers and addresses are lost and as forgotten as their greatest hooks, solos, beats and riffs. The lyricists' sharpest lines reduced to tarnished blunt-edged gems — their time-dulled, hollow ideas buried within a shallow and murky pool of obscurity. Spirits crushed by the doldrums of society via its hammer of mediocrity. Age finally taking its toll on even the mightiest warriors of original music; their hopes sucked down into an abyss of longing for what could have been but will never be. Beaten down musicians gravitate towards day jobs that keep them close by — as if they can't be an officer of the army, they'll settle for being a slave, so long as they're near the foundation of the empire they dreamed of conquering. They settle for mailrooms and cubicles or behind counters and desks — serving those same fat, clueless record industry imbeciles that passed them over. They end up in used record stores and work for free calling themselves producers, engineers, or music critics. Hair is lost or cut. Weight is gained. The staunchest worshipers of the Dark Gods of rock n roll who once prayed for His Satanic Majesty to bring the world to its knees is now reduced to either a drooling participant of reality TV, or worse, a contributor to the ratings. The bitter irony of truth being that many of the bands who far exceeded the originality and musical greatness of their peers were somehow miraculously passed over, pushed aside and never signed to major or indie labels. It is after all, not always how good you are, but who you know and how many people you put in the seats. On the corporate farm of the music industry — more succumb to the climate than are harvested. Its ever-swinging scythe cuts down bands like so many bothersome weeds. Those few naïve and brazen spirits of the young that are caught up in the industry's web of deceit eventually yield to its poison. They become whores, their musical direction dictated to them

by a need to imitate 'what's hot.' Even the best bands seem to give up the ghost before realizing their true potential. Trampled on blindly by hordes of willing new victims ready to die for their cause and be crucified by a system that lures them with an open door of empty promises, only to rape them of their originality in the name of money and marketing.

The truths are as evident as the sober reality is staggering. But be that as it may, it is in the spirit of the music itself — pure and unblemished by marketing trends or bottom lines — that its song resonates eternal. The sound of the notes may be muffled, but they can never be silenced. After all, music only needs a believer. Someone, who identifies, personifies, relates, or at the very least, is **moved** in some small way, however seemingly insignificant. Pompous as it all sounds, having 'the vision' is asking a lot of the average listener. At some point in a musician's lifetime — most would settle for simple recognition that there ever was a band.

And so without further ado, dear reader, (if indeed you are still or ever were out there) I return you to the tour diary. A journal that provided the nails which enabled the members of the Trailside Rangers to put the vision, the dream and the band to rest, though its spirit lives on. The fact that you are reading this is proof of that. Regards.

Wednesday 01/31/01, day off

In which explanations and observations are offered concerning past and future tour diary entries; along with terse notes on a few tour dates and other astute observations which can most certainly not be left out of this history.

I sit in a quaint coffee shop somewhere between Huntsville and Birmingham, Alabama. The high has worn off and reality sets in as we begin the last leg of the tour with Duane as replacement for the deranged JT. It is a double-edged sword having Duane back. It's like missing your ex-girlfriend with a passion until you get back together with her and realize you again have to deal with all the things about her that you weren't so crazy about in the first place. **(Editor's note: The author must like this analogy — careful readers will note that he already used it once prior to this.)** I love Duane — but he is a pop-culture junkie — and so he's constantly feeding us a mass media stream of information that none of us ask for. Graveside is no help as he jumps in from time to time with his own comments and recollections. Often he challenges Duane on the accuracy of his facts, which then spirals off the conversation into a super debate of nerds who have catalogued a lifetime of pointless and trivial information that they feel they must share with the world. Jason and I can't get a word in edge-wise or for that matter hear ourselves think. It's maddening.

On another note the laptop computer I have been keeping this journal with thus far has been stolen. The last time I saw it was before our gig in Memphis. By the time I realized it was missing, it was too late to circle back around to see if and or where it had been misplaced. I think it's safe to say at this point we can write it off as a loss, since Jericho Hill Records contact information was plastered all over it just in case such loss occurred and Rowan back at JH Headquarters hasn't heard anything. Off to the black-market with all my files including lyrics, stories, some poetry and (of course) some decent porn to pass the time by. Computer chess and solitaire will have to give way to (gasp) playing games with real live people.

Entries to the journal have been on hold until today as I have resorted to writing by hand. I purchased a nice leather-bound notebook of the same variety I have in the past — which are mostly filled with blank pages and doodles. Writing by hand has become something of an oddity these days. Nothing fascinating to report in the way of live shows occurred since then, but for the sake of exercise I will sum up each gig location in six words or less:

- Saturday 01/27, St Louis MO — Mark Twain's Museum lacks Huckleberry Finn.
- Sunday 01/28, Little Rock AR — More roadside grave-markers than cars.
- Monday 01/29, Memphis TN — Graceland is shiny. Elvis is dead.
- Tuesday 01/30, Huntsville AL — Red means *floor it*.

(When I said exercise I meant my hand as well as writing — which is nearly numb with this entry. How did the journalists and authors of old do it with a quill, ink and parchment? This generation is spoiled — but in the case of word processing I can honestly say "My God — how could we have ever functioned without one?" I can't read a classic without wondering how many times it had to be written out long-hand by candlelight and recopied the same way, edited again and again before being taken to the archaic printing presses they used in those days. I mean think of it: Dicken's, many fortuitous volumes, Cervantes' massive *Don Quixote*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* — all originally hand-written. It's a marvel. I can't even get through a single journal entry without cramps, ink stains (by virtue of being left-handed in a right-handed world) and numerous expletives from having to cross out in the range of ten words per paragraph. Not to mention the tiny meandering footnotes (with little arrows denoting where they should be inserted) I try to squeeze in between rows out of sheer laziness, cringing at the prospect of having to start a sentence over instead. My admiration for authors is tenfold since this realization. Glory be damned. I simply couldn't do it.

Editor's note: I know I said I wouldn't be back so soon, but I thought it pertinent to note that the above paragraph was re-typed and re-edited even in translation several times.

Thursday 02/01, Birmingham AL

Which covers what will soon be read.

The club we played at was dubbed: Slammers. Not a bad place. I'm not sure that is a reference to the moshers that may or may not frequent there (sadly, nobody moshed during our set) or the shot / mixed drink. I seem to recall downing several 'Alabama Slammers' on a cruise ship once. It's consumption involves slamming the shot glass down — either before or after drinking it — I must have been either too drunk or unimpressed enough to remember. The combination of *Three Days*, *Opaque*, *Flamingo Johnny* and *Celebration* at each set's end continues to provide our best moments. Having Duane back has really stepped up the stage presence of the band. He is at his enthusiastic best in the limelight — bouncing to and fro chaotically like a jackhammer unleashed. It's catching to say the least. It makes us all giddy in the moment and drives us to shake it like we want to break it. I'm silly now, just recalling it. Here's to Duane!

Friday 02/02, Tallahassee FL

In which various band names are documented and jests are made regarding the most favorable 5th member of the band.

As we're loading into Shenanigans Irish Pub on our Florida stopover a couple of curmudgeons at the bar point out my T-shirt and holler "Buckwheat!" (Pronouncing it 'Buwheet'). Obviously it was in reference to the character from 'Little Rascals.' I don't know if it was an intentional attempt to be funny, a racial slur or outright dumb-assery but Jimi Hendrix should not be mistaken for anybody. He be one of a kind. I do get the occasional "Ohhh Carlos Santana!" response sometimes when people see my JH tattoo, but real fans of Santana would realize he doesn't play his guitar left-handed.

It's easy to tell we're in Florida as the back room where we played was lined with flyers from other bands. Florida is a hotbed of both really good and really bad music. I grabbed one of the flyers for posterity to share the band names with you, devout online reader.

- Plague of Puppies
- The Badger Gambit
- Teasheep

- The Moon Institute
- Bag of Ushers
- Candeldelta
- Donna Manlove and the Messy Devils
- Fistful of Anvils
- The Vicious Bone Gang
- And...(drum roll please) Damned Bishop

We laughed our asses off at the list — especially *Damned Bishop*, since it's a phrase that has been muttered a myriad of times on this tour! Oh the irony. What songs might a band called *Damned Bishop* sing? We pondered the possibilities:

'Damned Bishop' — the new record: *Dirty Silverware, Stored Next to Clean* — or — *Here's how I Envision it*, available now at all Bullwinkle outlets — featuring:

- Balls Out
- Joe, *Don't* Go There!
- Straight Edge
- Hold That Thought
- Touché
- Because I'm Right
- The Blast Part
- Rippin' Dude
- The Blast Part is Rippin, Dude

Saturday 02/03, Savannah GA / Sunday 02/04, Augusta GA / Monday 02/05, day off / Tuesday 02/06, Atlanta GA

Concerning the ill-conceived and distasteful process by which bands are booked, in great detail as promised by the author of this history in an earlier entry.

How can we tour through Georgia without a gig in Athens, home to a bristling and vibrant original live music scene? Who booked this tour anyway? (Please refer to the Tallahassee, Florida entry above for the answer.)

All kidding aside, booking bands sucks. I have to hand it to the diligence of Rowan, because having done it myself, I know firsthand that it's no small task. I'm certain that the people whose job it is to book bands for clubs don't have such an easy chore either — a combination of the two make it an all around distasteful process for everyone involved.

Picture the eager members of a newly formed band, distributing their demos en masse to every possible ramshackle hole in the wall that entertains live music. Their hopes are that they can conquer the world from the bottom up and become an overnight sensation no matter their geographic location. Whether it is from the heart of the stifling music scenes found in bigger cities or the outreaches of urban and rural communities where original music is often in competition with cover bands and the ever-nauseating (insert retching sound here) 'Karoke' nights. Picture club 'bookies' (we'll call them that for lack of better terminology) who become the recipient of a multitude of CD's, cassettes, biographical information, pictures etc from these said bands. The dizzying result of receiving all this loot / garbage and being in the position of being able to pick and choose who plays and who doesn't makes the 'bookie' a figure to be reckoned with. He very well understands the superior powerful place he holds over you and your lowly band-mates. You must beg and crawl, gravel and otherwise play whipping boy (or girl) to even get a return phone call. Of which, you'll make anywhere from around 5-10 of, before eliciting any kind of response, if ever at all. Should you happen to catch him (lucky bastard) and you do speak — at least those first five phone calls will be met with — "Yeah I have your demo, but I haven't listened to it yet. Give me a call next week." Here's where it gets tricky. If you don't bother him for awhile, he may either keep *not* listening to the demo or even worse, misplace it. It's probably really not lost and he hasn't listened to it and figures this will buy him time — or it's in the garbage and he doesn't want to break it to you, hoping you'll soon get the point and not call back. If he asks you to deliver another demo, then he has really lost it somewhere between the bar and his lonely one bedroom apartment. (Or perhaps the incompetent and uncaring bar staff never delivered it to him as they are also always inundated with band demos since Mr. Bookie is almost never around.)

When and if you finally make it to the point where Mr. Bookie actually answers the phone on the day and time he asks you to call him back, and provided he has listened to your demo and given it a smirk of approval (it's highly doubtful you'll get much more than a smirk of approval, don't take it personally — Mr. Bookie has more shit to sift through than a plumber) then comes the task of lining you up with other bands who are a 'match' to your band's particular style. Some bookies really try hard to do this — some don't try at all. The Trailside Rangers have been matched up with metal bands, hardcore punk bands, pop bands, jam bands, washed up classic rockers trying to get out of debt and nameless other oddities and genres of music. Now we don't really mind this in one respect. We all share a love for different kinds of music. Our influences are wide, so it's safe to say we're comfortable fitting in where we can. It's always challenging (and thus rewarding) to win over an

audience that would otherwise never have lent you an ear except that you happen to be playing the 45 minute set before them.

The only real issue comes to light when you're gigging in your hometown and have invited every relative, friend, co-worker and stranger you've happened to convince to come out and see you play. They fork out their hard-earned cash (which you are not going to see all that much of, if any) and then the fireworks begin when the bands before and or after you absolutely suck ass, play way too loud, way too long, or don't play a genre of music even close to yours.

This is a good way to lose the support of even your staunchest network of followers. One can't blame them — they can only take so much abuse. By virtue of being in a band you've already forced them to travel, park and navigate through dangerous and or seedy sides of town, pay cover charges, utilize unsanitary facilities and drink warm, overpriced beer. The cherry on the cake is when they show up early enough to witness the vomitous charade of bands before you, or show up right on time but don't stay because of the vile excuse for amateur rock n roll that take the stage after you. It is via this method that Mr. Bookie does not draw any sympathy from me for bringing the bar's business down and (with any luck) being eventually fired, because (news flash) most local bands can't pull all that many friends and family out after a couple of the above scenarios. To even your closest friends, seeing your band live is as noble as giving blood. Most of them will start thinking of some pretty good excuses to be out of town well in advance of seeing your next email or flyer announcing where your band is playing next. They will figure after a few gigs, that they have paid their dues in regards to their support of you. This is especially true after the novelty of you playing in a band has worn off.

On the flip side, if you gig in clubs and bars whose bookies actually give a damn and are savvy enough to line you up with some good quality talent that happens to work well in conjunction with your band's sound — then they have done you a great service and are to be worshipped as the gods that they are. We have had success and failure with both types. It's the nature of the business.

A triple win for you is developing a positive relationship with a good Mr. Bookie and maintaining that by keeping him happy. Whether that is with numerous customers or just because he actually likes your band doesn't matter. Here's to Tom from Nitengale Bar in NYC! I don't think he ever considers how many people we do or don't bring out — he always pays us fair, treats us kind and re-books us instantly. I'm certain that he just outright

digs the Trailside Rangers. There are others, but few of them — The Irish cat from Sun Mountain did right by us, the dude from Speakeasy as well — but both of them were fired and replaced before too long. Some pretend they like you, but then only use you as filler — and you walk away penniless and feeling used. That jackal that booked the Court Tavern, in New Brunswick was one of those. What a dick. He booked us with Glen Burtnik of former Styx fame — (whose fans absolutely deplored us) then made us wait around until closing to be paid the measly and obscene amount of \$40. If I remember his name I'll print it, because he was the same insipid twit who cut *Red Willow* off in the quiet part during his radio show. (See tour diary entry: 11/27/00.) A real overachiever, that guy. I'm sure by now he's been fired though.

So no matter what side of the fence you fall on, a Mr. Bookie or the nominated book-er of your band, it's safe to say that both sides are yellow, never green. In summary: Love, respect, honor and praise whomever is booking your band. Listen attentively and patiently to their gripes, frustrations and endless bitch sessions. It's a thankless, tedious job that consumes hours that could otherwise be spent writing new songs or practicing. If you're lucky enough to have someone outside of the band booking your shows — treat them as an honorary member. They deserve it. It takes a special dedication to fulfill that role and just as important as say, a band *manager*. (And *that*, my dear readers, is a topic I'll save for a future entry. It's a long and painfully disappointing subject that we Trailside Rangers are all too familiar with.)

Wednesday 02/07, Nashville TN

A dialogue of recollections both past and present.

Let it be said — Nashville is our kind of town. That being said — we were happy to get back on the road. It's a bit like really sweet frosting — a little bit is enough, too much might make you sick. The history here runs deep and one does not easily walk the streets without being intimidated by the knowledge of the great musicians that walked there before you. It's a songwriter's paradise — in that there is a lot of bottom and top of the liners. Not much in the middle. It's scary in a way, because you don't know for sure where you stand — everyone plays their cards so close that you're never sure if you've impressed them or made them more comfortable because they realize they're better than you. It's as though if they acknowledge you're good then they've just taken themselves down a peg. That's the kind of strange tension prevalent in the clubs and bars here. It's really everywhere to a certain degree, but here it's thick. We did our thing as always — being respectful of the bands we

played with, timely on and off the stage and rocking genuine. But who knows if we made any real impression? That's the conundrum this band has always faced. There are sometimes moments (many of them when things are going well) when we look across the stage, through the lights at each other during a song and know that we're all thinking — "Damn this is a good set." When you're on, you're on, and it should be evident to everyone within earshot and beyond. But I don't know that we've been consistently recognized at those shows. Feedback is always helpful to a band — good or bad. Let them know if you were moved...or not. Perhaps we just expect too much from an audience.

We've played *Casy* flawlessly time and time again at shows. In our opinion it is a solid mid-set staple — heavy, raw and forged with fury. We can really showcase our dynamics as a band during the song. But all too often — after we've completed the song in a violent reprise of roaring guitars, thunderclap drums and deep black bass beats — it's as though the audience is startled by the sudden silence and realize (about 15 seconds too late) the song has ended. By the time they start applauding, we're already well on our way to starting the next one — though a little dazed at wondering what the onlookers thought of *Casy*. Were they paralyzed with awe? Were they lulled into thinking it was a false ending? (Admittedly we've been guilty of that at times). Or did they just flat out find it boring? I don't think we'll ever know.

Thursday 02/08, Knoxville TN

A short paragraph which the reader will soon be enlightened about.

The gig went okay, not as good as last night. We are very tired and it's showing. The cycle of the road is spinning us into the spokes of the wheels. Alternately, we're bored and deliriously exhausted from driving, playing, eating, waiting around and otherwise killing time to get through to the next show. Having read the tour schedules of *real* bands (those ones that make a living at it) I feel as though we're whiners. I recall the tour schedule of Iron Maiden in the CD liner of one of their live discs — I think they were on the road two straight years with nary a day off. Egads! And here WE are complaining. Boo hoo on us.

Friday 02/09, Greensboro NC

An even shorter paragraph on the subject of nutrition.

After the sub-par showing here — we need real food. Though our budget is slim we stumble into an all-night diner reminiscent of *Joe Juniors* in NYC. We order pancakes, ham and eggs and bacon, toast, jelly, cream cheese, bagels — the works. Even chocolate cake —

before the meal please...(oops sorry, wrong band!) Ahhh. Nourishment. We must focus. The coffee is here. Must drink more black coffee. Yes — black as midnight on a moonless summer eve, as that guy *Cooper* used to say. Damned good. Damned hot too.

Saturday 02/10, Fayetteville NC — 10:30 am

Documentation of something wonderful in the way of diners, silverware and the faithful drummer of the band.

I'm writing this down as a side note to myself. At some point in the near future I must record our brilliant drummer Jason playing silverware at the dinner table. Prior to and throughout the tour, I have watched him use various objects; plates, glasses, cups, salt and peppershakers, ketchup bottles, napkin dispensers, menu holders, and the table itself (anything in sight is fair game) as percussive instruments. They are riddled, tapped, dinged, ticked, poked, knocked, slammed and doinked by whatever flatware is set before him. It is almost as much of a riot as it is incredible hearing the cohesiveness of it all. Jason has a talent for being able to lift one's spirits just by virtue of listening to him play. (This counts for real drums too.) He inspires delight and laughter with his circus-like kaleidoscope of sounds. Give the guy a woodblock and a cowbell and let the magic begin. You will find yourself uncontrollably smiling and shaking your head. I swear his combination of wacky beats and unique sounds strung together just so trips the joy-switch of the brain. In diners all over Manhattan (and now the USA) he has treated us over and over again to displays of his ingrained expertise for eliciting sounds and rhythms out of ordinary objects. There is something really amazing about how much he knows about what kind of sound he'll get out of not just striking an object, but striking it in just the right place. He'll tell you a ketchup bottle has a number of sweet spots, depending on how much sauce is left and whether the cap is on tight or not. On this tour alone, we have been witnesses to diner displays of genius that could have been filmed and shown as a clinic on creative percussion at drum conventions around the world. Jason's playing truly personifies his character — one of a kind, solid, full of heart, alive, happy and shining in the light of the world. That's our McGillicuddy.

Saturday 02/10, Fayetteville NC

An essay on how not to suck, in which many entertaining anecdotes and opinions are conveyed to the reader in a most amusing fashion.

It doesn't get any weirder than this — okay maybe on the Lower East Side but we're in the

South for gadsakes. Tonight the band that opened for us called themselves *The Unholy Hamster Factor*. Creative name — check. Ominous looking homeless guy for a lead singer, dressed in tatters and rags, missing a few teeth, w/ optional scruffy beard and wandering eye — check. Sullen looking band members wearing mascara and playing out of tune — check. Vocalist who doesn't really sing just kinda yells an odd string of obscenities which he tries to pass for being poetic — check. *Theatre of the Absurd* would have been a better name for them now that I think of it.

We all sat at the bar and just kept trying to figure it out. I don't have anything against creative expression. I just don't like *weird* as a substitute for being *good*. These jacks did everything they could to appear dangerously close to being dangerously close to doing something incredibly stupid — like knocking off the convenience store across from the cop shop downtown — just to show how brazenly they walk through the world without a care (as if any of us give a damn.) And nobody out there better retort with some argument about punk rock. Punk rock has passion. When it's really good, it's an assault on apathy. This band was the epitome of indifference. And in my opinion if you really have no cares you can continue to have none all you want — by yourself, at home, preferably. To call this ramshackle display of a performance, art — (performance art is even stretching it) would be like pissing on the floor and comparing it to the work of Jackson Pollock.

We have played our share of shows with numerous bands of this same ilk. In one of my other bands previous to the Trailside Rangers, there was a CBGB's audition showcase we played with *Missy Loveglory and the Holes*, (or *Missy Love and The Glory Holes*, I can't recall which). Missy herself was unkempt, unclean, and proud of it. She smelled not at all pleasant, leered and sneered and otherwise flailed about making her presence felt. She was already performing long before the band hit the stage, making an absolute spectacle of herself in anyway she could muster. In her case it was to stagger around as though she was high splashing her drink on anyone within three feet. *(Editor's note: Contrary to what you're thinking this was not Courtney Love.)* When her and her band took the stage, she made an announcement that she wanted to take advantage of the sensory perception that one often acquires with the loss of eyesight. With that, she pulled down a large scarf over her face, which was to serve as a blindfold. It is important to note that her spandex pants were stretched out to the point that they were in danger of falling to her ankles — she must have borrowed her larger-sized roommate's pair, or gotten hers caught on a doorknob. With anyone else of even a modestly attractive appearance — maybe this wouldn't have been so bad. But every face in the front row showed an extreme concern that they would

momentarily be exposed to something they really didn't have any interest in seeing. Perhaps that is why Missy put the blindfold on in the first place.

Her band fell right in line with the gloriously celebrated stupidity that seemed to be their theme. While the guitarist played, his right bare foot stretched out to step repeatedly on the keys of an electronic Casio keyboard that was strategically placed on the floor of the stage. Throughout the set he made a few genuine attempts to look like he was actually playing chords, notes or something that he had worked out in rehearsal. He even changed the settings of the keyboard in between songs so that we could hear the subtle differences in the noise he was making so well. The lanky chick bass player was providing some backing vocals, though over the howling and wailing of the recently blind-struck Missy — it was evident that they were not influenced by the Indigo Girls. The drummer was — well who cares at this point?

The audience endured this spectacle of inane drivel for a merciful albeit painful 30 minutes. (It was audition night and they kept the sets short.) Yet every song, each minute they were onstage posed a new threat to the possibility that Missy's loose drawers would drop to the floor and expose some hideous performance art message in her dank nether regions — there seemed to be no doubt that this is what she had planned. Thankfully the shock of that was never to come, as each time she swung clumsily about the stage to and fro in her self-induced blindness, she caught the ruined elastic edge of the spandex pants the very moment before they slipped below her hips.

This ordeal had no effect on our performance except to give us a boost of confidence that we would pass the audition. A couple of months later I saw their name in the **Village Voice** — they had **passed** the CBGB's audition and were booked to play a Saturday night. Don't ask me. I don't know. On the flip side, my band, (**Logic Downwards**, as those of you who were present at this gig will remember) did not only **not** pass the audition, but we were berated for being (and I quote) **unprofessional**. "You guys really need to get your shit together," said Mr. Bookie, who was really a **Miss** Bookie for the record. Now, the epitome of Neil Young and Crazy Horse we were not — but despite being a little green, we were well rehearsed and had our chops down. Our 30-minute set was met with resounding approval by not only our friends who were happily impressed, but the entire audience — who roared their enthusiasm throughout the show. Call me bitter, color me dumbfounded and slap me silly — I'll be damned if I can figure it. But these days — I look back to that time and realize **it just doesn't matter**. Do what moves you, be proud and to hell with what anybody else says.

One other example of this sort of absurdity was when the Trailside Rangers played a club called 'Downtime.' The short version is this: The band prior to us had a mock blood-fest black ritual to some pagan god complete with someone playing the part of a human sacrifice. This willing toad was bound, gagged, had his head shaved, hot candle-wax dripped about his person, pierced and otherwise abused in numerous variations, all played out for maximum visual effect. I doubt many folks in the audience weren't at least mildly amused by this spectacle. However, I'll wager most of them don't remember **the music**.

(Editor's note: These days there is a home for those musically challenged – it's called American Idol.)

It is important to note the above examples illustrate a tactic that certain types of bands similar to these employ. They put on such a sideshow of vapid silliness, that you don't pay as much attention to how bad they are musically. I'm not suggesting you shouldn't have a robust stage presence or an act to accompany and compliment your band's performance. But isn't it the aural that attracts us to those musicians we idolize? Wasn't it that heart-wrenching song with all the right verses that made you want to slash your wrists? Or the sonic charged power chord in the chorus that rose the hair on your arms? What about the solo that induced you to play air-guitar with a tennis racket in front of a full-length mirror? The anthemic vocals that you sing out loud and proudly in your car or with the crowd of a captive audience at a concert while waving your lighter high in the air? (And yes, you **do** sound just like the record!) The lyrics that move and speak to you in a way that nobody else understands? All these combined together — the music that reaffirms your very existence or at least makes the day seem less long? Isn't all this what **really** matters?

Ask yourself – and substitute a band of your own liking: Would the stage show of **Kiss** (I'm waxing nostalgic) be (or have been) as powerful and thematically entertaining without the solid foundation of their musical material? Sure there are flare-pots and laser lights, break-away guitars and hydraulic drum risers. The make-up is spectacular and the costumes and stage props too. But all that without **Detroit Rock City**? Without **Love Gun**? No **Black Diamond**? Is there a song to vomit blood to better than **God of Thunder**?

I think not.

Remember the music!

And with these words, I step off my soapbox for the day.

Sunday 02/11, day off

In which observations are shared with the reader regarding idiosyncratic band related tendencies and prototypes that were analyzed throughout the tour and documented here.

Bands come in all flavors. Over the years in my experience being a member of and observing various bands (especially on this tour — in which we have nothing better to do but examine, critique and criticize ourselves and everybody else) I have come to some general conclusions about some typical band member prototypes. I believe **every band** has one or more of the following character personas or a mix of them. Having identified these, I made it a point to rank them as well.

Ratings (1 to 5 – 5 being the best) were given to each persona based on the following criteria:

- ****Musically Inclined****: Skill as a musician combined with creativity and imagination as applied to creation of the band's songs and their individual contributions.
- ****Dedication****: This is pretty straightforward — based on how dedicated the persona is to the band in regards to both good and bad times and generally not making all that much money. Are they sticking it out in both sickness and in health?
- ****Having the Vision****: A very important factor. Is the persona aligned with the other members in the musical direction you are all striving for, or not so much?
- ****Overall Ranking****: The average of the three via simple math determines this number. Handicaps can add or subtract points as indicated.

These three categories were chosen as they are fundamental, in my opinion, to the success or failure of a band. There are certainly more factors, but for the sake of brevity I have limited our list to these three. This is certainly not to say that bands with high ranking members are always successful or the opposite — it's just what I would consider a good foundation for a band's success. After all, the determining factor in that regard, would be what your definition of success is. Here you have them — in no specific order.

****The Utility Player****: This is usually the cat with all the chops and a variety of them at that. They can play several instruments all very well, the only problem arising when they want to insert (for instance) a harmonica solo into a song just because they want to show everybody what else they can do besides play (_____). It is their wont to put extra instrumentation into any space unclaimed by another member when no vocals or guitar solos are taking place. It is in this way that the Utility Player can damage a song's integrity because they don't really have the song in mind as much as their own ego. It is usually in the interest of the band to limit utility players to their main instrument — excepting the studio

where they can be quite useful.

- Musically Inclined: 5
- Dedication: 4 (as long as they get plenty of stage time)
- Having the Vision: 2 (If you're lucky)
- Overall Rating: 3.6 — Utility Players are great for practical purposes — but need to be coached in order to be truly effective.

****The Charismaniac****: Keep the camera on the money. At home center stage and supplying the charisma for the band is the Charismaniac. In terms of being a team player, he's the self designated Captain. Charismaniacs tend towards being the vocalist, the guy who supplies all the off-color onstage comments, bad jokes and banter to the crowd. He gets everybody to drink on cue, applaud for whomever's birthday it is and oh yes he actually sings once in awhile. When he does, he's inclined to bare his chest and become overcome with emotion and make religiously iconic gestures towards the rafters. All in the name of getting a good piece of ass.

- Musically Inclined: 4
- Dedication: 4 (Without a band, they're flipping burgers.)
- Having the Vision: 3 (for the music.) 5 (for pussy.)
- Overall Rating: 3.6 — Many local bands owe their success to the loudmouthed, egotistical lead singer who can belt out the ballads drive home the anthemic platitudes in a Cadillac. But it doesn't matter how good his/her voice is if the image of the entire band is at stake and they're careless with it — say by wearing a loud, frilly outfit or backing into the drumset while doing beer-choreographed dance steps.

****The Composer****: No band is complete without him. In fact — he usually forms the band in the first place. Having spent his teen years holed up in a dark room listening to records and writing his own songs on a barely functional Kmart guitar, he comes to the table well seasoned. Though he can possess assets of many other prototypes for the most part, the Composer understands that the song is the star and he needs an orchestra to help him put it together.

- Musically Inclined: 5 (Even if their style is not to your liking, they probably play it very well. They are masters at being able to 'hear it in their heads,' even if they can't physically play it themselves.)
- Dedication: 4 (A 5 rating means they'll probably commit suicide at some point in their career.)

- Having the Vision: 4 (Much of the time they have the *ideas* and the vision is what the band makes of them.)
- Overall Rating: 4.3

There are also a couple of sub categories to this persona that I will not expand on but will mention as they can factor in more complex scenarios. They are:

1. The Lyricist – A composer of lyrics only — while they may have an idea of what music they envision with their words, they will need the help of someone who can lay down the soundtrack.
2. Musicianist — A composer of music only — this persona puts music to lyrics provided to him / her.

These personas can very easily mutate into and out of others listed here, which is why we will not go through the complex process of trying to rank them.

****The Conductor / Reconstructionist****: A key component to a successful band. The Conductor, whether he writes the songs or not — feels a personal connection with the material which must be addressed at all times. He lives and dies by *The Vision* and the band's application of it. (They are sometimes referred to as Reconstructionists as well, which came about as an analogy to them trying to reinvent the wheel. There are times when you achieve nothing but paralysis through analysis.) On the positive side, he won't ever play a single note that doesn't fit or doesn't push the song towards what he envisions the song to be. On the negative side, you may find yourselves paying for rehearsal time just to stand around and argue whether or not the drummer should be playing 16th notes or 8th notes during the chorus. Though — as a positive to the negative — the band should be honored that someone would take the time to labor over the details of a song in this fashion. It can be a tedious process working with the stalwart Reconstructionist — but well worth it in the end.

- Musically Inclined: 4
- Dedication: 4
- Having the Vision: 5 (They own the rights to this terminology.)
- Overall Rating: 4.3

****The Classicist****: There will be no bad notes, missed beats, out of tune instruments, or flat vocals in the scope of The Classicist's vision. He usually sports a black belt in music theory (or at least the karate-chop snobbery that comes with it.) They are high-brow in taste and have little tolerance for those who would oppose them. This is not to say they don't at

times make really good music, or contribute to the overall sound appeal of a band. (But let's face it — all the really good Classicists are dead.) The real problem lies in the pomposity and lack of imagination of this persona. If they didn't take themselves so seriously they would be a terrific addition — then again, that would mean they weren't truly a classicist. When Classicists get together in groups they form art-rock bands, which can either be astoundingly good or nauseatingly bad. You know the ones.

- Musically Inclined: 5
- Dedication: 3 (This really depends on the other attributes of the band — Classicists don't generally mix well with other personas and this is the recipe for a band's failure before it even takes off.)
- Having the Vision: 2 (Classicists are stoic romantics and therefore their 'vision' is all too lofty for any mere mortal outside of Mozart to achieve.)
- Overall Rating: 3.3

****The Enthusiast****: A great fanatic of music whom is also a product of punk rock. No rules, no holds barred, no ear for being in tune or caring. The Enthusiast is the polar opposite of the Classicist. The Enthusiast can make up for whatever they lack in musical talent by sheer desire and willpower. When rock and roll needed somebody to turn over the tables, spray-paint the walls, spit on the floor, set fire to the curtains and generally reek havoc amongst the social classes therein — along came the Enthusiasts. They possess the embodiment of a rock n roller without necessarily possessing any musical skill or talent whatsoever. And does it matter? This is rock n roll after all.

- Musically Inclined: 3 (They rate at minimum a 3 because though they may not know how to play all that well, they know what they like and appreciate good music.)
- Dedication: 5 (They are in for the long haul. They don't want real jobs for christsakes!)
- Having the Vision: 4
- Overall Rating: 4

****The Mercenary****: Gun for hire. They play for pay. Unfortunately, these guys are usually the best in their class at whatever instrument they wield. I say unfortunately, because they lack so much in the other two key rating stats that they are doomed to forever be the bottom suckers of this list. There is something terribly un-rock n roll about being so adept at what you do that you make everybody shell out for your services. Studio time, your sister's wedding, parties, Bat Mitzvah's, sitting in for your sick bass player, they'll all cost you dearly, if not in coin than in sheer groveling.

- Musically Inclined: 5
- Dedication: Nil. ('Just give me my cut.')
- Having the Vision: Huh?
- Overall Rating: 1.6

The Mercenary is not to be confused with the Session Player. Session musicians play for pay and earn well-deserved Union wages for their services. Should a Session Player wind up in a band, you can be assured that they really like the material and have a stake in the project aside from money. For these reasons Session Players are not rated here.

****The Unionist****: The backbone of great rock-bands. This cat unerringly shows up and plays then goes home. He is always on time for rehearsal and shuts up for most of it. Unionists are normally well-schooled musicians with a natural abundance of talent. Though, it is also widely believed that many Unionists were once Enthusiasts who dedicated themselves to bands for so long and played their hearts out so much they eventually became skilled musicians.

- Musically Inclined: 4
- Dedication: 4
- Having the Vision: 4 (As long as it sounds good they'll play it with passion any way it works).
- Overall Rating: 4

****The Incessant Noodler / Jammers****: Break out the bong and tie-dyes then throw away your watch, nod off and wake up in time for your solo. What may be a great 4-minute song on a CD becomes an 18-minute extended slow-motion blur of vapid rabble. Unless you are a Noodler too, it is advisable to avoid them if at all possible. They render rehearsals fruitless, recording sessions exceedingly expensive and simple band discussions impossible because they WON'T STOP PLAYING for a fucking minute!

- Musically Inclined: 3
- Dedication: 2 (They are always looking to 'jam' with somebody else — you're nothing special.)
- Having the Vision: 2 ("Pass the pipe and pull up a chair, I'll tell you about a vision I had...")
- Handicap: +1 (I despise jam-bands, so perhaps I'm a little biased. Their visions may be valid in their own way.)
- Overall Rating: 2.6

****The Designated Hitter****: The self-proclaimed DH believes the entire band hinges on his being a member of it. He's not much of a team player. As far as the band is concerned he mistakenly believes — he **is** the band. The vast majority of DH's are lead guitarists, can't play rhythm guitar to save their lives and are only truly happy if wide open spaces are written into each song so they have room to showboat. They also have a tendency to be financially motivated and so you'll often find them in cover / wedding bands. Ick.

- Musically Inclined: 4
- Dedication: 3
- Having the Vision: 3
- Overall Rating: 3.3 (Though they can be difficult to deal with, a DH with a properly stroked ego can deliver the goods. The problem is keeping them happy while not compromising the Vision.)

****The Hangers-on****: They'll buy your cigarettes, help you load / unload your gear. They'll stand in the crowd and give you signals on who needs to be turned up or down. They'll walk around and bother people for their email addresses to add to the band's mailing list. When there is a soundman, they'll bother him. In short — The Hangers-on will pretty much do whatever you want them to, as long as you make them feel like they are 'in' with the band. They contribute to band discussions as if any of the real members give a good goddamn what they think. Some Hangers-on even fancy calling themselves the band's manager.

- Musically Inclined: 4 (If they're willing to do all the above, they probably know your songs as well as you do.)
- Dedication: 4 (If you make it big — they'll expect you to take them with you.)
- Having the Vision: 4
- Handicap: -1 (Hey, they aren't actually **in** the band!)
- Overall Rating: 3.6 — Despite the fact that they are simply glorified gophers, the Hangers-on are your friends through and through. They normally help more than hurt a band.

****Combination personas****: There are times when some personalities are akin to others to the point that it's difficult to properly classify them as one or the other. Rest easy dear reader, I've done the work for you right here. The combinations are numerous but there are a few standouts:

****The Recomposer**** (Composer / Conductor): It is a good probability that the Conductor will eventually write some songs of their own — and doggedly require everyone in the band play them exactly the way he 'wrote' them, regardless of individual interpretations. A

composer can be guilty of this as well and thus denigrate his / her ranking and the overall impact of the band.

- Musically Inclined: 4
- Dedication: 4
- Having the Vision: 4 (in this way, the vision is compromised because they don't believe in any other member's ability to define it.)
- Overall Rating: 4

****The Mercenitter**** (Designated Hitter / Mercenary): A very likely (and distasteful) combination. Kick them out, fire them, shit-can them and find some Unionists or Enthusiasts. For even more fireworks and fun, don't pay them. Then time how long it takes them to say 'my lawyer' in their very next conversation with you. Pathetic whiners.

- Overall Rating: 2.5

****The Comthusiast**** (Enthusiast / Composer): An Enthusiast who also writes his own material. They are the good, the bad and the ugly of the music world. They are simultaneously loved and hated, worshipped and cursed, praised and dismissed. They are the wild, wild west of music personas. Who knows what they'll come up with: genius originality or unbearable muck.

- Overall Rating: 4.2

Editor's note: I have compiled a nifty table for quick overview of the above persona breakdown, sorted highest to lowest.

Disclaimer and a short summary.

****The Ego Factor****: Is not a show on Fox. It is no small matter that egos play a huge role in a band's inter-relationship with one another. The fact is that most people involved in bands have pretty sizable egos to begin with — where they fall in relation to their band-mates is anybody's guess. However mighty they may be and difficult to deal with they do not factor in this categorization because egos do not discriminate when it comes to these rock n roll personas.

Allow me to openly confess this character breakdown / analysis is a result of my playing Dungeons and Dragons as a kid. (Or perhaps — ahem — young adult.)

(The Elf and Paladin are of high intelligence and social class and can be neutral but usually

lean towards good. They rate +3 hit points with a twelve-sided die when determining their life total HP; while having no stable armor reduces their ability to take damage during combat and so minus 5 HP when in battle.)

I was pretty surprised at how accurate the scoring worked out when I finished this little project. I showed a friend this list (a Hanger-On, if you will who shall remain nameless) and he asked me to put each individual Trailside Rangers into one of the above personas. At first I refused, citing the delicate personalities that make up the Rangers. Then, I thought — oh what the hell, wasn't I going to lay it all out anyway and to the devil with the consequences? They are all good enough friends of mine that I'm sure they will take the stereotyping and pigeonholing with a grain of salt. Besides, I then thought they may wrongly place themselves with an incorrect (possibly lesser) persona than I had them ranked as. So here are the Trailside Rangers personas:

- John Graveside: Unionist
- Rowan Bishop: Conductor
- Jason Byrne: Unionist
- Duane Larson: Enthusiast
- Joe Wilford: Composer

Most of you (especially my band-mates) will realize that as Composer I ranked myself highest. Well, deal with it! Keep in mind — **I created the ranking system**. If you don't like it, create your own. After all, I have ranked accordingly in only three specific categories — all three of which are up to individual speculation and debate. One could add or delete and rank accordingly in different categories and by virtue of their own opinions come out with completely different results.

Monday 02/12, Charlestown WV

Outlining an argument that nearly broke up the band prematurely and indeed may have altered the course of the band's history and thus this history.

This tour is killing Graveside. He's starting to smell like a corpse.

In other news we are really kicking ass this leg of the tour. It's practically automatic at this point. The audiences have been very appreciative which is always nice. Particularly in North Carolina for some reason I'm not entirely certain of, although we have a track record of success here with **The Great Divide** CD release.

The Great Divide – was released at a time when the Trailside Rangers were sadly mismanaged. *(Editor's note: Just one of the many times, he means to say.)* Unfortunately that CD fell victim to our bad discretion in choosing a bogus and incompetent label to promote and distribute it. I often think that the set of circumstances surrounding that release hurt us in multiple ways — and it's a shame because many consider it our best work to date. 750 of the discs were packed up and (we can only hope) shipped out to various promotional outlets across the country. The actual 'shipping' part we have never verified. It is assumed that since the promotional CD packages were indeed packed, labeled and ready for shipping that they were in fact shipped out. But only the two fuckheads that ran the label will ever know for certain. Since all correspondence was directed to the label that now no longer existed, we never received tear sheets of reviews we may have received, good or bad.

Nonetheless, we somewhat recovered from having the entire pressing of *The Great Divide* go for naught as not long after the release we received our first royalty check from BMI. It totaled just under \$40. A modest sum to say the least, but the breakdown showed that *Flamingo Johnny* was played on various college radio stations 250 documented times. The money meant little to us, but the fact that a song of ours had found it's way on to several college playlist rotations left us feeling ecstatic. It was then reconfirmed as the Trailside Rangers were noted in a certain radio station's (WDCE — North Carolina) published list of bands currently in regular rotation.

It was a triumphant and disheartening feeling all at the same time. Triumphant because we were finally getting the attention we thought we deserved. Disheartening, (in my opinion) because we probably missed a golden opportunity to expose ourselves up to a widespread audience. I'll explain. The royalty check was proof positive that it was *Flamingo Johnny* that had lifted us to this higher (albeit modest) level. My disappointment stemmed from the fact that at pressing *Flamingo Johnny* was not considered by Duane and Rowan to be good enough of a song to be showcased as the first track on *The Great Divide*. In reality the band nearly broke up due to the disagreement we had concerning the order of the songs recorded for *The Great Divide*. With the recording complete and only the graphics and design of the disc needing to be worked out before being sent for pressing, the battle / debate of the song order began. I had always (wrongly) assumed that *Flamingo Johnny* would be the first track on the disc. It was, in my opinion and I believed everyone else's opinion in the band that FJ was our finest work to date. It has all the elements of a classic Trailside Rangers song: There are dynamic peaks and valleys, vacillating roar and twang combined with melodic drama and hooks galore. (The story line lyrics and lead / backup

vocals don't disappoint either.) There are plenty of great songs on *The Great Divide,* but end to end I thought *Flamingo Johnny* was flat out the best chance we had to deliver a knockout blow to the listener. I'm no expert by any means but everything I've ever heard or read regarding original bands and their demo discs has amounted to this:

Make sure your best stuff is first, right up front — don't bury your best work two or three songs in. Whoever is listening is probably going to have made a judgement on it after just a few minutes nevermind a few songs.

This reasoning prompted me to suggest *Flamingo Johnny* lead off the track listing. Jason had no input on this. Rowan and Duane vehemently opposed me — citing other songs they felt were better suited to take the first spot. After a few go-arounds arguing each other's points things got pretty heated and Duane decided to drop out of the debate. Rowan's position was that he had already given much thought to this and had arranged the ten songs in a pre-determined order that (in his opinion) artistically made the most sense. I didn't see it that way. Neither of us would back down — and it became dangerously apparent that this disagreement could end up being 'the great divide' of the Trailside Rangers.

Rowan didn't outright disagree that *Flamingo Johnny* wasn't our best song. But in his eyes, the producer should be the deciding factor in the order of the track listing. I wasn't buying it. A producer should certainly have input, but not uncontested control. Besides, we weren't *paying* Rowan to 'produce' the disc — he *asked* to produce it as he was attending engineering school and wanted the experience. I don't see that us allowing him that privilege terminated any of our rights as band members with our own opinions. After all — he didn't have any prior experience!

At any rate — he finally was able to wear me down to the point that I consented. The production and song order of *The Great Divide* rests squarely on the shoulders of Rowan Bishop. It is today arranged in his artistically pre-determined order from start to finish. *Winton Flyer* was placed as track one. Listeners wouldn't hear *Flamingo Johnny* until 90% of their way through the disc, as it was buried all the way back at track nine out of ten songs.

Realistically, none of this would have been such a big deal in the long run had we not received the royalty check. The royalty check amounting to airplay and dollars in compensation for *Flamingo Johnny* confirmed what I had argued for all along. Despite being buried in the track listing, there were obviously a *few* radio programmers who managed to make it through the other eight songs on the disc and decided that *Flamingo

Johnny* was the track to add to their playlists. My question was how many programmers had listened to or skipped though the first few tracks on *The Great Divide* and then chucked it into the reject pile? I often wonder how different the overall airplay results might have been had *Flamingo Johnny* been the FIRST track. I don't have a problem with outright rejection of the material. It's not for everybody. Perhaps it's not for a lot of people. The heartbreak was that our showcase material was not properly utilized; slotted in those first 30 seconds to three minutes a band has to make a good first impression and grab the listener by the collar. In its place was good song but not a great song.

Alas, I have closed the chapter on this grievance of mine. (Though I'd still like to pull Rowan's goatee a few times for his stubbornness.)

Tuesday 02/13, Norfolk VA

Concerning a theory regarding the unmentioned internal hierarchy of the band along with some other grave revelations.

File this under 'Taking me down a peg.'

I'm sure this entry stems directly from yesterday's rant on the fate that befell *Flamingo Johnny* during *The Great Divide* recording sessions. Call me paranoid, but I've often felt as if Rowan and Duane conspired (consciously or sub-consciously) to do what they could, come what may, to take me down a peg or two when the opportunity arose. I can't find another way to express it other than that. Whether this comes from the fact that I'm the principle vocalist and songwriter of the band and they feel they have to keep things in check lest my big ego wield it's mighty sword, I can only guess. I have often felt as if they are 'reining me in.' And perhaps that's not a such a bad thing, if it were warranted — but I don't believe it is. I could give other numerous examples (besides yesterday's journal entry) but I don't want to make too much of it. It never really bothered me all that often. For the record: I have always been very diplomatic regarding decisions the band made (even in some instances where I felt I may be compromising the integrity of my own work.) Enough said. All the walls are coming down.

In regards to last night's performance — it's clear we can see the light at the end of this long dark tunnel. Or perhaps in our case: the garage at the end of the driveway. Though we're all exhausted, our shows have taken on the white-hot adrenaline rush of a heroin overdose. Okay, I've never done heroin — but I expect that this may be the elation one feels having pierced a vein with the legendary white horse. Truth be told, heroin would be my drug of

choice, though I'm too afraid I may like it too much to risk trying it. Why am I going on about all this? It's near the end of the tour folks, I'm running out of fresh analogies to describe the nightly repetition of a tour. It's not nearly this glamorous all right? It's not glamorous at all. Deal with it already. But we are 'rocking' every night if that means anything. And it probably doesn't. Who is listening? Who cares? Who is going to go home and remember us in a week? Where is the recognition? The understanding and comprehension of 'The Vision?' I can tell you that it is not in the eyes of those in the crowd night after night. So is any of this even worth it? Who are we fooling?

Not even ourselves.

We'll go home. Back to our jobs. Back to Sunday dinners with the folks. Back to society and mediocrity. The cable company, the cubicles, the computers and desks, the morning commutes. We'll rejoin the robots of the working world. We'll come home tired and retire to the couch. We'll never miss another episode of primetime TV.

It's just the course a band like ours follows. Like the course a river takes before it's eventually swallowed up by the sea. And when we finally reach our own beloved beds for a change, we'll lie down with the corpse of a drowned dream.

Wednesday 02/14, Richmond VA

Which outlines the author's thoughts on the intricacies of songwriting and a poem thrown in to boot.

A critic is not capable of distinguishing between a safe move that is executed, and an interesting mistake. An interesting mistake is by far the more valuable. —Paul Simon

Because I don't really care what people think about it. I mean, I do care if people like it or not. But that doesn't affect what I'm doing. —Neil Young

There's just no reason to participate in the construction of music on an intellectual level when all you have to do is get lucky one time and then have the record company do the payola. —Frank Zappa

If I knew where the good songs came from, I'd go there more often. It's a mysterious condition. It's much like the life of a Catholic nun. You're married to a mystery. —Leonard Cohen

Let the words come up

From the bottom of the underneath
With the soil and clay of their obscurities
Muddled meanings have poured
Out of the scars of the earth
Into black bubbling pools
They have poisoned barbs and sharp tusks
and thrash about in brackish water
Wear your courage and willingness to fail.
Go ahead – reach in.

A little poem about songwriting. Or perhaps any kind of writing. To some of us, the words just come — there is no rhyme or reason to why or how. For others, it is a long and difficult process. I've always found it easier to allow yourself the luxury of writing a really bad song. Go ahead and fail. It takes the pressure off. Say to yourself: "No one ever has to hear this." This method also allows you to take some chances with the work. Throw in a C sharp minor during the bridge — whatever. The key is putting the right words to the appropriate chords, or vice versa. In effect, I consider myself a composer rather than an actual songwriter. Yes I write songs, but the process works best for me if I compose the music and then build the words into that – in a way that illuminates each and so that one is no more important than the other.

I remember one of the dullards that attempted to manage our band said something like: "You guys are tight — definitely label-ready, but honestly *story songs* don't really sell."

First off, we almost vomited in disgust when he said 'label-ready.' What a lofty and pompous statement – no more his to make than it would be ours to claim. What makes a band 'label-ready' anyway? Sounding like Creed? Ick. Then there was the bit about story songs. It's amazing that this *vapid ass-clown* (with all due credit I think Duane coined that description) could pretend to know anything at all about music and not know how stupid that statement was. I looked at him and then realized that indeed, he had a big red foam nose and goofy looking oversize shoes. We promptly fired him and took our label-ready story-songs somewhere else, thank you. *(Editor's note: Available for somebody else to mismanage, perhaps?)*

On the subject of 'story songs' Rowan stated in the *Promise and Prayer* press release that I 'read a book then write a song' — which is a pretty bare-bones description, but one I cannot wholly deny. At least in the case of these past few years with the Trailside Rangers. I guess I

never really thought about it enough to realize that, as I don't typically like to analyze my own songwriting. In truth, there are as many songs not written in this fashion as there are that have been. This is not to say that I write songs about the books themselves, but am perhaps inspired by them and include selected ideas and elements that are at play in the stories they tell.

For example, '*The Grapes of Wrath*' inspired '*Casy*' but was not written about Preacher Casy in Steinbeck's book. It was about a character I created and put in the same scenario as a possible character from '*Grapes of Wrath*.' '*Red Willow*' was written with influences I gleaned from having read '*Black Elk Speaks*.' '*Winton Flyer*' – Faulkner's '*The Rievers*.' The Bible – specifically the New Testament mixed with characters from '*The Sound and The Fury*' and anecdotes of my own were combined to pen '*Three Days*.' Those are the most obvious examples I can think of. '*Unfurl My Soul*' was the only song written deliberately — end to end — solely about the book '*As I Lay Dying*.' (Obviously — William Faulkner was a huge influence during this period of the Trailside Rangers. I think I read the entire library of his work in one summer.)

I remember reading an interview with Bono in '*Rolling Stone*' in which Bono had asked Bruce Springsteen why he didn't write any songs about himself. Bruce said: "I'm just a guy from New Jersey." Well, anyone who knows Springsteen's work even remotely can tell you that 'guys from New Jersey' are exactly the kind of characters who populate his songs. My point is that songwriters who employ the technique of telling a story often insert themselves or parts of themselves into the characters they are writing about. So even though they don't appear to be front and center in the spotlight — they are likely to be positioned stage-left. A good example any Springsteen fan can easily point out would be the "Tunnel of Love" album. The subtleties of a troubled relationship are evident — yet very carefully woven into the material. And surprise — Bruce was divorced not long after. Authors can't help but inject themselves into their work — somehow, somehow. There is just a myriad of ways to go about it.

Rowan and I had a conversation along these lines at one point early on in our Ranger days when we were calling ourselves the likes of 'Jericho Hill,' 'Giddy-Up' or 'President Quayle.' (One of those.) I remember he mentioned that some lyricists "muddy the waters to make them appear deep." That struck a chord with me as a pretty clever tactic. It was admittedly one that I myself had often used in the past from time to time. *(Editor's note: See 'Scenery' off of 'Bridges' as an example of this. What the heck am I—ahem—he talking about?)* With that on my mind — I set out to write more concise material. I wanted my

lyrics to be clear — to be understood — to say something concrete. To be relevant and meaningful without being trite or pretentious. Being deliberately vague is to leave the door of interpretation wide open — which can be poetically brilliant and give the work an amazingly mysterious quality. *(Editor's note: See the Baltimore based band LUNGFISH.)* But I had dabbled in that before and without so much success – at least personally I can say it wasn't as satisfying to me anymore. And while I didn't want to hold the hand of the reader / listener (I find that extremely distasteful in both songwriting and especially in novels) I at least wanted them to be able to visualize what pictures the words generated. They could take it from there. It was around this same time I was unceasingly listening to Dylan's *Desire*. Here were story-song behemoths to be reckoned with. *Joey*, *Isis*, *Hurricane* — what an amazing record. To say it inspired me is an understatement.

I wasn't really concerned about being a great lyricist. I just wanted the words to appropriately fit the music. It was my intention that the music boost the intensity of the lyrics. The text is important — the music needs to be its exclamation point. The sound has to drive the ideas and stories the words portray. Each by itself has to be strong – but together they have the ability to become combustible. Those moments when the words and music explode like shrapnel fragments are when you know you've hit the right combination. (These opinions are the result of concentrated doses of Neil Young and Crazy Horse, obviously who were also of paramount influence.) Whether this implosion / explosion ever happens in the song boils down to a matter of the listener's personal interpretation, but as the author of the work, you have to assume that your audience will follow. Using *Casy* as an example again — I can't recall that I've composed a more appropriate combination of chords coalescing with the words.

You search your heart (E minor)
To find the answer (G major)
Some people just don't understand, I guess (D major)
It's just a shame that we could (C major)
Treat each other (G major)
So unkind (D major)

E minor is a black and ominous chord — it sets the tone of despair. The vocals kick in — imploring, Rowan's backing vocals providing an audible prayer — followed by a siren-doom wail of guitar notes perilously perched on the edge of everything.

It's just a shame (no pun intended) that this song never seems to generate much response

when we play it live, as we have on this tour. But as I've stated above — the 'combustion' happens at the listener level. You can never be sure that it will ignite a spark in them — even if it has in you. Pay no attention to this. Believe in your work — appreciative listeners will find you. Even if they are small in number. (Which is certainly the case with the Trailside Rangers.) When all is said and done — I write songs for me and share them with others. It matters not whether there are listeners — a song still has to worm its way to the surface.

Since I gave an example of (what I consider) a combustible match of my own words and music, I'll round things out and give an example of when it hasn't worked. (There will obviously be no recorded version to compare it with, as this example never even made it to a rehearsal tape.) The Trailside Rangers worked for a long time on a song with a working title of 'My Home.' It was something we wanted to execute in 3/4 time. Try as we might it just never came together — and we did give it quite a few rehearsal sessions, though Rowan will disagree we didn't give it enough time.

Well if you'll notice I'm out here sunshine or rain
in my face you'll see the loneliness and pain
I've got no one else to talk to, so I talk to myself
but this pride-filled lonely old man won't ask your help

Go ahead — sing it to yourself in 3/4 time. It's a challenge, but it can be done. And I think that was the problem. We were trying to force it. It seemed imperative that we do a song in 3/4 time just for the novelty of it. Later on, we went back and tried to work it out in 4/4 time but the moment had passed. There was little inspiration left to manage the song into a workable format. In my opinion, songs shouldn't be 'structured.' Examples of these are only too prevalent on the radio. A lot of those songs probably started out fine — then were structured into auditory vehicles meant to manufacture a hit single. When you've pieced out a song like that then you've also sacrificed its magic. 'My Home' had lost its appeal, because the magic was no longer there. Perhaps it never was. I was never happy with the lyrics either.

Having mentioned the damage 'structure' can do to a song leads me to this next paragraph I will write on bridges in songs. Some would have you believe every song needs one. I vehemently disagree. A bridge is a wonderful thing — when it is written because the song demands it and only then. Far too many artists insert bridges into their songs simply because they are following a standard songwriting formula or they 'think' that the song needs one. To them I say: Rebel! Organize! Revolt! If the song isn't absolutely hinging on a bridge being

written in then leave it out. My own favorite bridge can be found in *Buffalo Hurricane*. It's necessary to the climax of the story and music surrounding it.

Re-reading the above, it actually sounds like I think I know what I'm talking about. *I don't! *

Opinions! These are all just my personal opinions. There are no rules — just be sure you're not following someone else's. Rely on your instincts — don't think too much about it and have fun. For me, there's nothing that releases endorphins into my head so much as when I'm smack in the middle of a song that's writing itself. In that moment, whether it fails or succeeds to be a great song doesn't matter. You have your finger on the pulse of something you've *created*! (Inserting my best Gene Wilder impression from 'Young Frankenstein': *It's aaaaaalllllleyeive!*)

There are those times when the songs don't come as easily. It's difficult not to play the same chords over and over again. You find yourself singing the same song in a different key. New ideas become elusive. The words and music and their meanings lie at the bottom of that black pool of murkiness and you become fearful that you will ever be able to coax them out again. When that happens, don't be afraid of your own blood. Get messy. Dive in. Fail. In failing, you may stumble onto an idea or sound that will spark a new beginning. It may not immediately be evident. Or you can try to change your approach. Perhaps it's time to introduce a new instrument into the mix. (You don't have to know how to play it — just make noise on it like a kid would do. Let go. Experiment! It seems silly — but it works.) Or do nothing at all. Back away slowly and wait. I've done each of these at one time or another. They've all worked and failed alternately. Sometimes it takes a lot of squirming to get out of a rut. The important thing is not to be afraid when it happens. If creativity is in your gene pool — things will happen just as natural as rain to stimulate it.

In summary — there is a theory among writers that the first step in learning the craft is simply to *read* good books. A LOT of them. I believe this translates to songwriting as well. Look or rather, *listen* to those whom you admire for inspiration. And also to those you necessarily don't.

Such is the process of songwriting / composing as I see it. (As if you had asked.)

Thursday 02/15, Washington DC

Concerning the literal breakdown of the van and a literary breakdown of band rivalries.

DC is a great town with arguably one of the most vibrant and active local music scenes in the country. We're happy to be a part of it on the tour. F Seattle. DC rocks.

Though we may never make it there. Why? Because it is at this point in the tour that the van is supposed to break down. And even though ours has, I'm not going to elaborate on it because it's too much of a goddamned cliché. It's a beautiful day. (It's cloudy). The sun is shining. (It's freezing.) And I'm sitting on the side of the road. (Squatting.) Not because the engine of the van is billowing smoke, but because I **want** to. (Denial of the obvious.)

While we're waiting for the tow-truck, here's a little bit on band rivalries. There's nothing better than a good honest competition between bands. It nearly always occurs at every level, every time your band is playing with other bands — before or after. It is especially fun when you play similar styles of music. (When the genres are so identifiably different, it's not really all that competitive — kind of like two different sports entirely.) The Trailside Rangers have had three really good ongoing band rivalries. They are:

- The Barnburners
- The Hangdogs
- The Whiskey Band

Each of the above bands we have shared the stage with numerous times. Each time there was mutual admiration and respect — but man, when we hit the stage it was an all out war to see which band could blow the doors off of the other. There's really no obvious way to judge the event — it's just kind of a gut call as to who wins. But it's usually clear (at least it always has been to us) as to who came out on top.

Earlier in this tour **(Editor's note: Journal entry date 1/07.)** we went up against The Barnburners, who have honestly smoked us quite a few times. We blistered their asses the last time around though. So I'm really hoping the van issue isn't going to cost us the rest of the dates on this tour, because I know they're scheduled to open for us in New Brunswick this Saturday 2/17. I am looking forward to soundly handing them their heads on a platter. We're so tight at this point I think even if we broke multiple strings we could still outplay them. Okay — maybe I'm exaggerating a wee bit. Cut me some slack — I'm bored, losing my mind and can't wait for this tour to be over. Honestly though — should we rough them up musically on Saturday, I've contemplated shouting out: "I hope you took notes! Now don't forget to thank us on your next CD, you bridge-and-tunnel bozo's!"

All kidding aside, we love The Barnburners. It's only with this degree of love and respect

you can sling the shit so freely. And they can out drink us every time.

The Hangdogs are another great band. The problem is: they know it. They seem to cast us in a disparaging light (by virtue of their rather stand-offish attitude.) Which is fine because in my eyes that signifies their acknowledgement that we are capable of smoking them on the nights we play together. They treat us as if there is not that possibility when exactly the opposite is true. (I realize this is in-depth inter-band psychology at work here; bear with me.) As opposed to The Barnburners, there is no active dialogue with the Hangdogs. It's a relatively silent changing of the guard when one band is exiting the stage and the other is preparing to set up on it. There are modest exchanges of pleasantries veiled in a smoke-screen of "Top *that*, suckah." It's all in good clean fun. I think we're each honestly more concerned about our own fans finding the other band more appealing than we are worried about each other's individual opinions.

We opened for The Whiskey Band a few times back when we were still pretty fresh out of the gate as the Trailside Rangers. They made it a point to pay us compliments. They were not worried that anyone would find us musically superior to them. (Or perhaps they could see that we were still a bit green.) At any rate, they treated us with respect and we always had a good time on those nights we shared the stage. One night there was even a good old fashioned bar-brawl that spilled out onto the streets of Roselle, New Jersey and we all joined in the cause watching each other's backs. Now *that's* band camaraderie for you.

I remember a gig at CBGB's one spring in the early nineties, which found us on the same bill with the likes of then up and coming buzz-worthy alt-rockers *Our Lady Peace*. Henry Rollins and Iggy Pop were there — the place was jammed to the rafters on the talk that OLP were the next big thing — the band to see, watch out for. We were scheduled to hit the stage directly after them, which in this case (in band lingo) is considered the cleanup slot. We arrived early to see what all the fuss was about and indeed, they certainly lived up to the buzz. Like them or not, they executed flawlessly and sounded crisp and new. Heads and shoulders above the other bands prior to them. They were making a definite impact — and as we watched from backstage, we could see that it was going to be difficult to follow them. They finished their set — played an encore or two then came backstage. There were even roadies taking away their gear. (You know you've really made it then, I guess.) Maybe they were just caught up in the moment, but they looked right through us. It was as if we didn't even exist in their airspace. (Backstage at CBGB's is spatially limited — it's not as though you could get lost back there.) I wanted to congratulate them — acknowledge their great set. I soon changed my mind. It would be falling on deaf ears. They were full of themselves

already. Ripe with ego. I made myself promise not to be so heady if and when this moment ever came for the Rangers.

We excitedly hit the stage hoping to impress those that remained in the packed house. The only problem was, when we hit the stage, the house wasn't packed anymore. In fact — it had cleared out as though someone had shouted "Fire!" Such is the fate of sharing a bill with a band with that much of a buzz surrounding them. We played a very uninspired set to an audience consisting of the bartender and a few of the wait staff wiping down tables of spilled beer. I thought — "Aha. This is why they call it the cleanup slot."

Friday 02/16, Philadelphia PA

Which outlines that ever-sensitive subject of band managers; confound them all to the devil anyway. Or not.

As we draw ever closer to the inevitable end of this tour I have begun to notice a few things. Jason often speaks in a voice that sounds as though he's talking backwards. Duane's hair is turning gray. The corpse-paint is wearing off of Graveside's face. I'm drinking way too much tap beer and hard liquor.

Among other things the van was repaired after being towed to a local garage. We left it overnight and caught a mini-van taxi that could hold all our gear to the club. We had no idea where we would spend the night at that point — we were just winging it to keep on schedule. (Hey, it was DC, perhaps *Fugazi* or the *Bad Brains* would show up!) We ended up crashing at the bus depot — like a gang of homeless people who had no shopping carts to roll their possessions around in.

The show itself was less awesome than we had hoped it would be but it was a modestly appreciative crowd. For some reason we are suddenly getting the jitters. End of tour jitters. Weird. It's almost as if we'll be getting out of prison, released back into society and won't have a clue what to do with ourselves. What will we do with our lives when they are not on a pre-determined course maintained and managed under the strictest of supervision? Could this be a not so subtle segue onto that ever distasteful of topics yet uncovered regarding band *managers*?

So it is. Well, despite my constant level of angst concerning managers the Trailside Rangers have endured I'm going to keep this relatively short. Suffice to say I've given this topic much thought and in doing so — I find myself less angry than simply disappointed. Those who expected to find a blistering blow by blow account of all the management mishaps over the

years will be disappointed too, because it's not happening here.

There have been those certain individuals (and they will remain unnamed) who have offered their support and help to the Trailside Rangers and in that process decided that they were good enough at it to earn a percentage of whatever proceeds the band made. Let's be fair: nobody is going to get rich in this scheme of things. Should a major label pick up the band — they have the legal firepower to eliminate all subsequent deals made on diner napkins over the best falafel in town. This is not taking into consideration original bands don't get paid a percentage of squat anyway — so said manager is not going to make enough money to cover his/her subway tokens for a week.

In essence — anyone who has helped the Trailside Rangers book gigs, promote them, their CD's and / or in general try to get the music to an appreciative audience — I offer up my heartfelt appreciation. Managing a band is a thankless task (at least I know I wouldn't want to do it) — one that in an overwhelming majority of times does not pay off in the end. I equate band managers with music critics. Their music collections are enormous. They spend way more money than they make on purchasing new music. It's their only fix. They simply cannot justify not being involved in music to one end or another. It is their life. They would probably work for free, but if there were a chance at some meager earnings then all the better. The obvious draw seems to be the immersing of oneself in all aspects of the music business — and that's a double-edge sword, sharp on one edge and jagged on the other. I can only speak from the jagged side: Managing musicians whom have grouped together as a band means being able to put up with a lot of bullshit. There are multiple character traits, personalities, emotions and opinions running rampant in a band scenario. To willingly manage the business affairs of such an entity — god help you.

In coming to this conclusion — to the managers that we've employed and worked with over the years — you have my gratitude. Accept my humblest apologies for being a pain in the ass. In general, we were all doing the best we could — and had unrealistic expectations of each other. You were supposed to get us that record contract. We were supposed to be the band that took over the world and made you a lot of money. In each case — neither of us had the necessary connections, luck or fortune to make it happen. I'm certain each of the individuals that took on the job of managing the Trailside Rangers only had the best intentions to begin with — regardless of how things turned out in the end. Break-ups are painful and can get nasty. It's no different with bands and their managers. So it goes.

During this online diatribe I have often made reference to managers and more often *mis*-

management as it related to the affairs of the Trailside Rangers. The term *manager* was loosely applied. To my recollection — we only employed three managers over the course of our history. To those three — the above paragraphs of apology and gratitude apply. There are others whom have had a hand in 'managing' certain situations the band has been involved in that do not get a pass.

Our lawyer was one example. He took our retainer money quick enough — but when he quit his law firm and went out on his own (reportedly to further his cause of becoming a true 'entertainment' lawyer) he stopped returning my calls. Then calls to his number were met with a disconnect recording. We never heard from him again. This kind of abandonment with our cold hard cash in hand is nothing short of criminal. So where ever he is — f him.

Also those two blundering idiots formerly known as Funky Mushroom records, whose personal dispute between them resulted in maligning the release of *The Great Divide*. That cost us dearly. Should I ever have an opportunity to eye-gouge, drop kick or otherwise beat them senseless I only hope I have a chance to put on all my cool skull rings first.

There were a handful of others in this same category not worth mentioning. So it goes. Life's lessons.

I will however, go out on a limb to make note that one of our 'official' managers: Mr. Brian O'neil, despite our obvious failure to 'make it' in the music biz, always put his best foot forward for us. Not only did he treat us with respect, kindness and as (gasp) friends, but we actually got the most promising results from his multitude of efforts. He succeeded to get our first CD *Peacemaker* out to press far and wide — thus ensuring us many favorable reviews. He also pitched the disc to various industry types (some of which are well known enough that you may have heard of them yourself) in an effort to broaden our musical horizons. That definitely got our name out there. In addition to booking us at the many popular NYC venues, he also got us in the door of the more difficult to book NY clubs; specifically CBGB's and Continental. In the PR department, Brian got the head of CMC International to actively listen to *Promise and Prayer*.

These bullet-points are the short list and nothing to take casually. They are just some of the thankless jobs that take a load of time, numerous phone calls and a whole hell of a lot of schmoozing. Brian had good contacts and he leveraged them to our advantage whenever he could.

I know I can speak for the whole band when I say — hats off to you Brian — you done

good by us.

Saturday 02/17, New Brunswick NJ — 8:00 PM

Which outlines a list of items great and small along with some dark and triumphant revelations seen through the eyes of the author.

The things they carried:

(Not to be confused with Tim O'Brien's great Vietnam war novel, which is substantially more relevant.)

- Hardshell cases
- Tuners
- Guitar strings
- Picks
- Wire cutters
- Polish
- Nine-volt batteries
- ¼ inch jack adapters
- Numerous instrument cables of various lengths
- Three-prong adapters
- Electric extension cords
- Power strips
- Solder / Soldering gun
- Speaker wire
- Handkerchiefs
- Capos
- Duct tape
- A pillow
- Microphones / stands
- Machine head string ratchets
- Effects pedals
- A/B switchboxes
- Area rug
- Floor lights (red, green, blue and yellow)
- Mini-book lights
- Chewing gum

- Water-bottles
- Instrument stands
- Fan
- TSR banner backdrop
- Drum heads
- 3:1 oil
- Nail clippers
- Hand lotion
- Metal tins (for smaller items.)
- Canned food — soup / tuna / beans
- Mascara – (oops! wrong band.)
- Toothbrushes / paste
- WD-40
- Camera
- Black book
- Matches / lighter
- Wristwatch
- Cell phone
- Maps
- Condoms
- Cowbell
- Tambourine
- Misc porn
- Deodorant
- Cough drops
- Soap
- Slide
- Box-cutter
- Labels
- Ebow
- Set lists w/ notes
- Flashlight
- Promise and Prayer CD's
- Press kit / promo photos
- Accounting ledger
- Zippered cash purse

- Pocket knives
- Notepads
- Twine
- Bunjee cords
- Laptop computer — (before it was lost/stolen.)
- Assorted packages of Ramen noodles
- Ample supply of various books / CDs
- Masking tape
- Listerine
- Assortment of tools
- Towels
- Needle & Black thread
- Tuning fork
- 1 sm can of Goo-Gone
- Milk crates
- Sharpies
- Razors
- Straps
- Shoelaces
- Stopwatch
- Fuses
- A tattered deck of cards, missing the two of clubs.
- Glue
- Carpet remnants
- Duffel bags
- Counter
- 218 stage prop
- Wood block
- Cardboard boxes
- Sunglasses
- Rosin
- Rubberbands
- Staple-gun / staples
- Signs / promo flyers
- 2 stage monitor cabinets
- Guitars

- Amps
- Drum kit w/ cymbals
- Drumsticks / brushes

Because I feel a need to document even the mundane. There is a beauty and art even in assembled articles of everyday life. I promise to make more lists when I get home. Starting with that cabinet under the kitchen sink and the five-gallon bucket in the garage.

For the umpteenth time — vinyl, leather and denim are donned. Numerous black cases land heavily on the stage. We kneel on the ash-dusted platform under hot house lights among the spilled drinks, sawdust, spit and sweat to arrange our gear in preparation. Everything about this place shows evidence of overuse and abuse. The air is dank with the burned filters of discarded half-crushed cigarettes — their wisps of smoke a rising miasma from the floor. We breathe in the stinking gray ash air from an apocalypse of bands before us. Our boots stick to the keg beer residue as we cross the floor, unpacking and unloading our gear with a mechanical effortlessness. Instrument cable jacks click firmly into amp sockets, cymbals ring into place on their stands, lights are adjusted, cases thrown off to the side into stacks like piled carcasses strewn about. Sounds jut out — a few staccato beats and the slurring twang of strings at odd intervals in a variety of volumes and levels reverberate through the room. A few hacked up wooden tables and chairs populate the space like a collection of bones that were picked out of the garbage at random and reassembled. One red vinyl cushioned bench lines a wall — marked up with ink, sliced open here and there — foam ripped out or eaten away. Paint is peeling away from every surface. Pipes are rusting and corroded overhead — a slow leak drips from somewhere. The bathroom sinks and tiles are cracked. Flyers new and old cover everything like graffiti; the walls, pillars, doors, ceiling soffits, every flat open space possible is rendered for advertising. The old announcements are ripped only partially away and the new pasted or stapled over the top of them — years of layers and the ghosts of bands long gone are cemented into the wall of glue. Band stickers and logos are utilized in the same fashion — but find their homes mostly on the bathroom tiles, stalls and mirrors. A great number have been peeled away unsuccessfully — outlasting the very bands they advertise.

This is one club. All clubs. Over the past two months of this tour we have lived and breathed and squirmed in the wombs of new music all across America. We are but one more abortion. I light a candle for us.

The Barnburners are almost giddy. They live for this. But they have not been through what

we have just endured. Perhaps they will play on-throughout the years or maybe they too will break up. Maybe even bitter separation as is the case with many bands. I am thankful that is not the case with us. What band prevails tonight when we hit the stage doesn't ultimately matter as much as how much we'll be missed when we're gone. Or whether we'll be missed at all. To disappear quietly. Another place. Another time. A distant memory good or bad distinguished by virtue of one's association with the music of that period. Will we be a part of someone's hazy recollection? I can't answer that. Time will tell.

2:30 AM

The Barnburners succumbed as though they were a lifeboat sucked down in the whirlpool of their sinking mother ship. They vanished almost soundlessly from the scope of the horizon, overwhelmed by the magnitude and violent destruction of what preceded them to dark depths. We played with an unusual angst tonight that would not be denied. It was as if our veins were opened — blood flowed and the walls were red with the dying splatter of our sonic fury. It is nearly over. It is the end of the ending.

During the climactic break of *Celebration* I turned to face Jason. He was absorbed in the moment — a blur of whirling dervishness. His face both comical and anguished like a theatre mask. His arms unmercifully deliver an onslaught of blows; sticks hammering on the anvil of Odin. Unpredictable at every moment, a chaotic control always on the verge of something else — his drumbeats interlaced, falling all together, spinning wildly yet locked in succession like knuckled cogs on the wheels of churning gears.

From there I surveyed the unconscious stoop and swagger of Duane hanging onto his bass as though invisible hands and arms reaching up through the floor endeavored to tear it away from him. He would not let go. He was bent as though the song beats were staggering uppercuts to his midsection; his whole body driven skyward, lifted from the stage platform and back down again in perfect time to the music. Sweat poured from his brow, shaken off like sparks in a white-hot spotlight of resurrection eternal.

An arc of raven locks swept through the air to Duane's right — signaling a volley of Graveside's signature blast riffs knifing into the crowd before us like shrapnel. The volume is like a full on kinetic assault as he strafes the strings repeatedly. He careens in a slow circle in front of the amp stacks as though the breath of the sound itself is spinning him on an axis. His eyes are white with possession as though warring demons reside within his tattered soul, screaming for release — but it's only the layers of song sheering off the cliff sides of his determination and falling with a crash into the sea below.

I feed off the energy emanating from the electric live wire strings as they ring under my knuckles. The rhythm guitar bursts forth bellowing black smoke like an oncoming train derailing down a mountainside.

The combined sounds ignite the room like napalm. Like planes crashing. Giant Sequoias falling, their cracking thunder of resistance a fiery howl of ancient fury.

And then...of a sudden:

Quiet.

The sound is cut instantly like a guillotine blade exacting its toll. The music abruptly ceases as though sucked out of the room into the vacuum of space. Not even an echo reverberates through the rafters. A ripple of near silence suffocates the audience. Muted. Then, almost unnoticed, bubbling jangles of strings softly fall on the crowd like spring rain. Approach the microphone. It signals a cycle that begins all over again. Auditory stairs climbed slowly... deliberately.

Anticipation. The summit is reached, taken in. Deliverance. And then a wild-eyed jump. A free fall into the abyss of turbulent sound. Celebration.

Everything has poured out. The missed opportunities, chances. Ill luck, bad fortune. The lack of effort, the lack of a cohesive strategy or plan. It's my fault. It's all of us together to blame. And yet — what did we know? How could we know? There is more understanding in coming this far and not succeeding. Perhaps these are just the necessary steps of learning. We'll keep climbing and go forward with other projects. There will be other bands. Other songs. Other doors as of yet unrevealed. Still, there will never be anything quite like this. This moment in time. Here and now gone. I love these guys — but we'll each walk a lonely road away from all this after tomorrow night.

The burning candle is now a pool. It runs over and drips down like hot tears falling. A quiet gray thread of silky smoke rises in surrender as the hot wax cools and solidifies once again into a new form.

Sunday 02/18, New York NY

Whereupon the tour, the band and this diary come to an end.

The grand finale has arrived. *The Trailside Rangers: On the Road with a Promise and a Prayer* tour ends after this evening. And the band that *is* the Trailside Rangers will

become the band that **was**. It has been a tour that has been victorious, glorious, painful, harrowing, hopeless and hopeful all at once and never together. We have gained tremendously from this experience and despite the fact that this signifies the end of us as a band — hopefully the legacy of our songs and passion of our performances will remain. I am proud of what we've accomplished. With or without the tour, we did the best we could. We gave what we had to give. Sure — we could have, should have done more. Tried harder. We should have worn down the fucking grindstone itself no matter what it took to do so. But it is not so easy and it was not to be. This band has made its mark — even if it's just a smudge.

My Grandmother was a great storyteller. Throughout the course of this diary I have utilized much in the way of what she used to call "retrospective falsifications." The stories are told through my eyes — and some of the events are hazy at best. They were reassembled the way my memory recollected them. Though the bulk of these events actually took place in one form or another, they have been rearranged, tweaked and twisted about just so in order to fit into this nice package of words laid out before you. Though this is a 'diary' and contains all the personal aspects of such, it can hardly be called a 'memoir.' I say this because I know that with the personalities involved in this band there will be (at the very least) three other versions of what **really** happened. That is how it should be. They will tell their stories and they will differ slightly or perhaps significantly. They will have their own opinions, recollections and 'retrospective falsifications.' I want to make it clear that I was never speaking for the band nor representing more than a quarter of the band.

I said in the very beginning that I was going to lay it all out, the good and the bad. The sweetness, the greatness alongside the ugly and bitterly distasteful. Compliments and criticisms. I stand by them all. I said I was going to be vocal and let my opinions ring out like a bell, and that in doing so I was probably going to piss some people off. I'm quite certain I will have achieved that much. The participants in this story will silently nod to entries that satisfy them and scream bloody murder when they read something they don't like. **Whatever**. It makes for good hardcopy. Call it dirty laundry or what you will. They can write their own versions. It is a tongue-in-cheek purging. At any rate — it is obvious the good points outweigh the negative aspects.

Having said that — I will state without argument that I myself have been an ass. Admittedly at times I can be very difficult to work with. I have my own downfalls and shortcomings of personality that I'm sure each of my band mates could point out readily. For the sake of humility here are some: Often I was unwilling to sacrifice much of my free time to doing

the work that a band requires to be successful. I often left that job to Rowan and Duane — simply refused to take part. Rowan and Duane were left to do much of the administrative work involved in the band. I felt as if it was my job to write the songs and that I shouldn't have to make time for the more mundane tasks of say, hanging up flyers on billboards in the Village, calling clubs to book gigs, assembling promo packages and CD mailings. I wanted nothing to do with the 'business' of music. And because of that, I have contributed in part to the downfall of this band. A band united in its efforts to succeed certainly has better opportunities open up for them. I often took the path of least resistance. It's not something I'm proud of — in hindsight — it's just the way it played out. I can be selfish, arrogant and stubborn.

Though I've been critical and outspoken in this journal — it was not written with the intent to blame and bash my band-mates, while putting myself on a pedestal. I did not write this diary to aggrandize myself. (And for the record, I've written many more bad songs than good ones.) I wrote this diary to aggrandize the Trailside Rangers as a whole — as a part of a small albeit greatly insignificant history, in its full glory, the bad and the good. Alive with triumphs and miscues. A theatric musical drama played out with a cast of characters unique in their personalities and in their relationships with one another. This is not a document of what the Trailside Rangers accomplished. This is a document of what the Trailside Rangers meant to me — the experience as a whole. In my words, my opinions. It is 'an entertainment.' When you hold up the small victories and the sad failures side by side then at the very least you are looking at something real. The shining moments laced with the grime of reality.

It may be quite some time before I actually let this second half of the diary see the light of day. I should probably sit on it awhile and let the emotions of the tour die down. I've decided to let the swan song of the Rangers play out until there's nothing more than distant echoes cascading off the digital walls of the future.

I am now sitting backstage at the newest NYC club: 'Black Dodge.' I am going to begin making another list. I sit here on a milk-crate, the journal notebook pages splayed out upon the head of my amp. It's warm. I'm thinking in between the notes I'm writing out and as I look around I notice that for the first time Graveside is not wearing any corpse-paint. He looks an awful lot like Rowan, who said he would be here tonight. It suddenly occurs to me that I have never seen the two of them in the same room together.

Jason grins at me as he walks by. He yells out: "Wilfo" (wheel-fo) like always.

Duane comes up behind me wearing a T-shirt emblazoned with a picture of Johnny Cash

emphatically holding up his middle finger. His voice is a little unsteady.

"Well, this is it. You ready?" There is sadness in his eyes. We all feel it.

I nod.

In an hour, we will be ready to hit the stage with a vengeance. When the encore is over, the sun will have set on the band that was the Trailside Rangers.

The new and the old. A symbolic passageway awaits. The doorway beckons; its rusted hinges creaking with the weight of years as it slowly opens just enough for us to pass through it to the other side. The threshold crossed, the door closes with a firm resolve as the barrel of the lock engages. We find ourselves on the stage one last time. When we step off this platform — it will be into our own individual lives. Four vagabond musicians each going their separate ways. It is a special moment up here. And it will be a special moment when we are all four down there — looking up...remembering. The memories will live.

...and never die.

The End.

Prologue

I will miss:

- Seeing Duane's hair-fro sway through the bass beats of each song — lit up in stage lights.
- McGillicuddy's ability to make me laugh with nothing more than a wood block or a rim-shot.
- The Irish sparkle in Rowan's eyes the moments before a 'blast part.'
- Pop culture trivia – the highlight being Duane's innate ability to name the artist of every single song that played on the radio in the van — what year it came out and a plethora of other information tacked on for good measure.
- Rowan's natural musical intuition.
- Jason's flashes of brilliance with diner silverware and condiments in addition to his overall dynamic drumming ability.
- The air, like napalm around us when we've ignited the songs with a ragged desperation of sound...reaching out...reaching out.
- When the sound and the fury all comes together.
- The many comical faces of Jason while driving the beat.

- The power chords colliding with clean twanging chords like ice against metal.
- The sting of sweat as it rolls into my eyes.
- The smell of bad breath, tobacco and beer on a house-provided microphone. (okay... maybe not that.)
- Feeling the energy of a crowd when it all makes sense and the music is true.
- The bass and drums like horse hooves stampeding the deck of a ship.
- The cold bite of fresh air outside after a show.
- The feel of worn strings and smooth solid mahogany held tight in my hand and the lights playing on the mother-of-pearl inlays.
- The camaraderie of Rowan's backing vocals.
- The howling cries of feedback like wind whipping through ripped sails.
- Being immersed in the white noise of *Celebration*.
- The first three chords of the night — delivered like a slap, followed by a fist.
- Not having to think about it anymore.
- The ride on the back of sound unleashed.
- The peaceful surrender to quiet in those dynamic moments where silence is a note played with seriousness.
- Duane's cool T-shirts.
- Getting tangled in cables while crossing the stage.
- The quiet resolve of the last chord reverberating far into the night.
- The tiny plastic ridges on the 'volume' knob.
- Feeling like you're at the edge of everything.
- Sustain and command of the ringing notes of silver feedback harnessed like the crack at the end of a bullwhip.
- Confidence in the eyes of my band-mates when I turn back from the audience.
- McGillicuddy and I spitting out creative obscenities to the pizza guys in the dead of the night.
- Singing the final verse of 'Aimless Charlie.'
- The sonic fuzz blast of Rowan's amp.
- Recognition of understanding in the eyes of a stranger in the crowd.
- Adjusting the boom on the mic stand and noticing a crowd gathering.
- Those first few thundercrack drum riffs signifying the set will soon begin.
- The smile of beautiful girls everywhere out there in the hazy light of smoke filled rooms.
- The hunger to share the sound.
- Jason's drum fill in the 3rd verse of 'Flamingo Johnny.'
- The crash of finality ending the set when you know you've conquered the moment.

- Strangers dancing to the music of songs they've never heard before.
- Stomping on my pedal the instant before bridge of 'First Step's a Start.'
- That guy that yells out 'YEAH!' every once in awhile at just the right moment.
- The collage of jazz drum fills throughout McGillicuddy's repertoire.
- The muted silence before the click of the 'standby' switch.
- Playing the solo in 'Seven Percent Solution.'
- The studious crouch of Duane absorbed in the moment.
- Blowing drops of perspiration off the end of my nose — lit up like neon raindrops.
- Rowan whipping his hair around.
- The feel of microphone steel on my bottom lip.
- The resounding click of the toggle switch on the amp.
- The buzzing hum and heat of the amps when the tubes are glowing and flames of orange-blue lights peer through the dark from the back of the stage like the eyes of banished demons.
- The blind rage of layered power chords a moment before the silence.
- The butterflies a few minutes before the music begins — when anything can happen. The slate is clean and open minds are eager to hear what makes you who you are. Time to show them.
- The satisfaction of knowing you gave it everything — and it was enough.

— *Trailside Rangers-On the Road with a Promise and a Prayer, A Tour Diary.* ©2006 Joe Wilford