LIFE IN A ROCK BAND

"Guys write me wanting advice on starting a band. I tell 'em. Don't look for musicians. Don't put an ad in the paper. Just find some friends you share something in common with — partying, a brand of beer. That's better than being a member of a band for three years, making it and doing it all with someone you don't really know. If this all falls to hell, I still have three friends. And that's good enough for me."

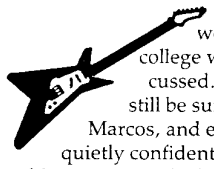
Paul Westerberg of the Replacements to *Rolling Stone* magazine

The first time I saw Greg McCormack, he was shooting baskets in our junior high gym. He hadn't missed in the five minutes I had been watching. Noting he was too skinny to take my position on the Junior Rattler eighth-grade basketball team, I promptly recruited him to play for us.

It was through athletics that all of us met. Glenn Gary was a quarterback on the football team, and he joined the basketball team actually believing there was a position called "gunner." Charley Ramsay played football, making up for what he lacked in size with what he lacked in sensitivity to pain. Joe March was a golfer who tried football and basketball; I was a football and basketball player who tried golf.

We entered high school with the kind of attitude problem seniors love to correct — we were cocky, loud, and disrespectful. When we won the district championship, our freshman basketball team took our non-alcoholic champagne-fueled celebration to the gym's lobby — and on into a San Marcos High School legend.

Our friendship stemmed from our love of sports and rock and roll, as well as our unspoken commitment that, if these were indeed the most carefree days of our lives, we were in no hurry to grow up.



The day we would leave for college was never discussed. There would still be summers in San Marcos, and each of us was quietly confident that not only could we recreate the kind of nirvana in college we had found in high school, but that we would find friends just as close.

High school graduation did arrive, though, and Glenn took off to Texas A&M to join the cadet corps. Greg and Joe went to Texas Tech, Charley enrolled at Southwestern, and I went to TCU to play football for the Horned Frogs.

College was not what we had imagined. The strength in numbers we once cherished had vanished. We rang up impressive phone bills keeping each other sane throughout that first year. When summer rolled around, it was like we were paroled from prison.

Still drunk from being home, we made plans to go see Joe Jackson in concert. What we saw was one of those shows you're more likely to read about than witness. Jackson yelled at the guitarist, battled verbally with members of the crowd, and made fun of the opening act — English poster-boy Paul Young.

In the car on the way home, we decided that if we were a band playing in front of thousands of people, we'd try to have more fun than Joe seemed to have.

"So why don't we start a band?" I asked.

It was an unusual idea considering none of us could play an instrument, except for Charley, who had taken a semester of classical guitar at Southwestern and could play "Greensleeves" and "Malaguena."

Still, it was all the experience I felt we needed.

In one of my most compelling car speeches, I asked the guys where they thought we would be if musical ineptitude had stopped Joe Strummer of the Clash. Probably listening to L.A. studio musicians do vapid lounge music, I told them. I was more convincing the next day when I went and bought a $50 pawn

by Rob Thomas

photo by Pam MacDonald

shop guitar.

I knew if we were going to form a band, I would be on guitar. Someone had taught me the opening riff to the Kinks' "Lola," and I could play the three chords I needed to fake my way through the Eagles' "Lyin' Eyes." I also had to be honest with myself. I realized early in life I was not destined to entertain with my vocal cords, but I also knew that women dig guitarists and I wanted to be dug.

Once the guys realized I was serious about this band thing, they adopted either a "what the hell" or "let's humor Rob" attitude — I'm still not sure which. But Charley asked for a guitar for his birthday, and the others hunted down instruments.

None of us could play, but once we had the equipment, we felt justified in calling ourselves a band.

Glenn was drafted to sing. With his buzz haircut growing out, he looked pretty punk — or hard-corps, as we called it. He had been an All-Something-Or-Other choir fag in high school, but he also wanted to play bass. We pointed out that for a total novice, singing and playing would be damn near impossible. Instead, for bass, we turned to John, his younger brother, who was about to enter his senior year in high school. John had lots of money, a big point in his favor.

Greg, the prospective keyboardist, left town for the month to stay with his mom in Dallas. Except for his absence, we had the lineup in place. Charley and I were on guitar, John played bass, Joe drummed, and Glenn sang.

We practiced on my back porch — both guitars, a bass, and a cheap microphone plugged in to the First Baptist Church's bass amp. The guitars were so cheap that they wouldn't stay in tune for more than a song, and we had to turn them down pretty low so the microphone wouldn't feed back. Not that we warranted any better equipment, mind you — we were beyond bad. We were forging new ground in the realm of awfulness.

But we were happy.

The name, Public Bulletin, was Greg's idea, but since Greg was gone, it was up to the five of us to ratify or reject it. Rejecting it would, of course, entail selecting a new name, and we had already spent hours of fruitless brainstorming.

'The show was timid at first but once the band got going, the crowd of ten began to erupt.'

Camp Gary was my personal favorite, but the Gary brothers didn't like the idea, fearing they might be forced to dress in drag. But there was a more pragmatic reason for not choosing "Camp Gary" — it's a federally funded job training center located just outside of our hometown of San Marcos. The Job Corps boys were notorious for shooting and stabbing each other during their forays into town. For some reason, Glenn thought this reputation might hold us back.

I thought our utter inability to play our instruments was far more likely to hold us back, but I saw his point.

Our sole original was "TV Girls." I had nightmares that we would be invited to play at an Amnesty International concert, and it would still be our only original song.

"This goes out to all the subjugated people around the globe!"

As the band thunders through those first recognizable pulses of "TV Girls," the crowd of socially aware youth of the '80s sing along with the chorus.

"TV girls ... welcome to prime time, TV girls...wish they were mine!"

Though the name is, admittedly, a wee bit pretentious, it came from a pretty sincere place — the side of a barbecue restaurant in Kyle, just south of Austin. The warehouse-looking restaurant had a "Public Bulletin Board" on the side of the building. Greg had noticed it on the way to that fateful Joe Jackson concert and said it would be a good name for a band.

We played our first show as "Public Bulletin" because we couldn't settle on anything else. The name stuck. We landed that show six weeks after we started playing. We knew eight songs, and we played for free. (Later we would learn to call these shows "benefits.") It was a going away party for one of the guys I worked with at the "San Marcos News." The day before he left, he turned in a review of our performance.

The headline screamed, "The Bulletin Hits Raw Chords."

"The show was timid at first," he said, "But once the band got going, the crowd of ten began to erupt.

"They were loud and trashy, like the Who before they learned to play, but isn't that how the British invasion got started? Five guys in a garage, blowing the walls down with their version of 'let's change the world.' "

The sports editor for the other San Marcos newspaper was a former punk who periodically slipped me Generation X and Replacements tapes to listen to. When he heard that we had formed a band, he did a feature on "Jock Rock." He defended the story as a sports item saying it was what ex-San Marcos High School athletes did with their summers. The story was brutally honest.

"The rhythmic flow proceeds more like a drugged lab rat staggering through a maze than a sleek Porsche humming along the Autobahn," he

said. "But doggoned if the enthusiasm behind the ragged music doesn't shine through. This is what rock and roll is at its core: Garage grunge, not high art."

About this time, Greg returned from Dallas, and the decision was made to include him in the band he had named, if he could only find some keyboards. No one really liked the idea of being a six-member band, but then, no one really liked keyboards either. Cool bands — the bands we liked — didn't bother with keyboards, but it was more important that the six of us share the glory, blame, or whatever that would surely follow.

photo by Dawn Doga

Greg has really been warped by this whole "sixth wheel" situation. He's had to constantly defend the synthesizer as not solely invented to provide background music for doing X. In fact, he's had to defend the synth as an instrument in general. It puts him in an odd situation because, like the rest of the band, he listens almost exclusively to guitar rock. He's also taken the time to learn everyone's instrument, as if to say that if the keyboards go, he'll gladly take someone else's job.

By the end of that first summer we had thrown a "back-to-school bash." We even called it a "back-to-school bash." Seventy people, counting our parents, crammed into my backyard and pretended we were tolerable. We had also recorded a ten-song demo in an eight-track garage studio in town. The tape included our then three originals, "TV Girls," "On A Leash," and "It's Over Now" — the latter a waltz. I kid you not.

Our fashion statement for that first summer was poly-faddish. Somewhere between the Clash and Duran Duran we carved out our own style. It looked as if we had bought our wardrobes at Aaron's Rock and Roll — lots of zippers, funny skinny rubber neckties, leather things. We couldn't play yet, but we thought we looked the part.

There was this sick feeling as we left for school at the end of that first summer that the band might be finished, but we vowed to keep practicing on our own and to come back to San Marcos during vacations to play. Joe actually got a class at Tech called "Trap-Set Drumming for Non-Majors." (The curricular advantages of public schools fascinated me when I was at TCU.) Greg took a piano class, and Charley and I began collaborating on songs through the mail.

When we met on Christmas and Easter vacation, strange things happened: we began playing on beat; people would stay in the same room when we practiced; we were even playing songs with minor chords in them.

Somewhere at this point in our development, we decided to write songs in a more serious vein. Boy, did we. Nothing less than the fate of mankind could be considered viable. Death. Pestilence. Disease. Nuclear Holocaust. We were not going to be one-upped on the anthemic battlefront.

From the beginning I had wanted to make a stronger statement lyrically than "she loves you, yeah, yeah, yeah," and I went through many stages looking for my niche.

I tried to write like Elvis Costello. I tried to write like Pete Townshend. I tried to write like Bruce Springsteen. It didn't work.

Those efforts were dandy, though, compared to my attempts at protest songs. Occasionally I'll find old lyrics tucked in my guitar case that are terribly painful to read: "With a longer life, eternal surrender, a darker night and a way to defend her." And they got worse.

Eventually I learned I would be better off writing about things that actually inspired me.

At the time I was inspired by the band. It was becoming increasingly important to us, even though we were the only ones who could understand why.

Other activities were losing their appeal. I was a second-string tight end at TCU, but I quit the day after the Bluebonnet Bowl. The band was part of the reason, but I didn't want anyone to know it.

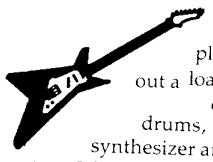
Glenn started reading Gandhi and Martin Luther King, called his squad leaders fascists, and quit the corps. Glenn always had been the model citizen of the band. He has since picked up the nickname of "the Mahatma" for the fine example he sets for us. He won't let us leave a

Hardee's without cleaning off our tables. He gives us the "Mahatma frown" if we drink too much, too often — or he'll drink to excess with us and feel guilty later. Glenn automatically vetoes any idea the band has of doing a song about sex and typically suggests something like the ecology as a more suitable topic. He's the one, he says, who has to get on stage and sing it.

'I was psyched to see these Zite Guys.'

Perhaps the band changed John the most. Having tasted fame and glory, he could no longer appreciate the adolescent thrill of cruising theater parking lots, listening to top-40, or even hanging out with his classmates. He was a musician, and his place was with his band. Still, to this day, we're not confident John likes us. He doesn't speak to us, and only rarely will he crack a smile. During most shows he stands like a totem pole on one side of the stage. But every sixth or seventh show he shocks us by perching on the monitors, wielding his bass like a bazooka.

Soon after John divorced himself from high school society, Joe, Greg and Charley decided to transfer to SWT in San Marcos, rent a house and make the band a priority.



It was time to take the big plunge. We took out a loan, eight G's — enough to buy drums, guitar amps, a synthesizer and a huge p.a. system. We had committed ourselves to three years of $50-a-month payments apiece.

We had just crossed over the hobby line.

Soon after that we got our first paid performance, our alma mater's junior/senior prom — a show we've been trying to live down since. I'm sure the crowd could hear us collectively breathe a sigh of relief when we all began a song in the same key.

We knew that true success could only be found in Austin, but before we could try to get bookings there, we needed to learn about The Scene.

We got the chance when Guadalcanal Diary, a favorite of the band, came to town. I was listening to the radio, and they announced that the opening act would be Zite Guys.

I was psyched to see these Zite Guys. After all the hoopla we had heard about Austin music, we were finally going to get to experience it.

We arrived early and crowded up to the stage with the rest of the crowd. I was shocked to see that the Zite Guys let two girls in the band. Later I saw a "Guadalcanal Diary/ Zeitgeist" flier which helped to clear things up.

I couldn't understand why I liked them as much as I did. Hell, they were just playing the chords we used. There were no long ass-kickin' guitar solos. I even thought the lead singer was a roadie until the show started; I expected more than a t-shirt and a baseball cap from a big time rocker.

This was motivation — we really didn't need Stevie Ray Vaughn in the band to be successful. We were closing in on an hour-and-a-half set. We had recorded some of our songs in my basement while my parents were on vacation. We made copies of the tape to take to clubs, and we were ready to start "gigging!"

We were told that a place called The Beach would book anyone, but we wanted to check it out before we took them a tape. We went to the club on a Friday night and it was packed, an easily accomplished feat given the shoe box size of the club. The band barely fit on the stage. When we saw them, our mouths dropped.

There were three guitarists, all with amps turned up to eleven. It was incredible. Their fingers slid up and down the neck of the guitars, as they traded off solos. The same thing was going through all of our minds: "If this is the easiest place in town to get booked, and this the kind of band that plays here, maybe our backyards don't look all that bad."

Luckily, someone explained to us later that we had seen the True Believers and we shouldn't feel depressed.

At the end of our second summer, we got our first Austin date, a Monday warming up at The Beach. According to the contract, we were to start at 9 p.m. and play until 10:30. That's exactly what we did.

We showed at 7:30 and began setting up, much to the amusement of the people working there. We hadn't developed that blase band mentality yet. We might as well have been wearing little signs on our backs saying, "This is our first show ever. Kick us."

It took a while to figure out that you show up right at the time you're supposed to play and then start as late as possible. These were the little lessons we learned with time.

After one of our early Austin shows, a friend told me that he didn't think he could ever learn guitar, but if he could play, he would be quite a performer.

"I've got all the moves down," he said. "I would be smooth."

That was exactly how I had felt during the ten years preceeding Public Bulletin when I was the world's premier, phantom-Fender guitar god. I could slide, saunter, swagger across my parents' kitchen floor while managing to keep one eye on the mirror to make sure I was maintaining a proper pout. Simultaneously playing behind my head and fingertapping, I would leap off unwitting furniture that substituted for drum risers.

But when it came to shows in the concrete world, I started paying attention to things I had never considered on my mental stage — like my feet, all size-14 of them. I suddenly knew where they were at all times. I noticed the guitar cables that would wrap boa constrictor-like around my legs, preventing me from going air-

borne.

I also noticed that the more I bopped around on stage, the more I screwed up on the guitar.

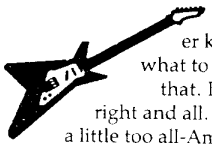
Throughout the next semester, we all got to work on the performance aspect of bandness because we were meeting to play shows in Dallas, Fort Worth, San Marcos and Austin. We put in new songs over Christmas vacation, and by this past spring we considered ourselves jaded enough to fit into the Austin scene.

We were doing all the things cool Austin bands do. Putting up fliers. Telling people in other bands we never read Michael Corcoran. Getting pictures taken by Pat Blashill. Wearing bolos. Showing up drunk. Showing up late. Or not showing up at all.

Oh sure, the only people coming to our Austin shows were from San Marcos, but we were at least trying to fit in. And then came our big chance. We were asked to play in Corky's Star Search. Our first time to play in the Continental Club. The chance of a lifetime.

Or at least the chance of a Monday night in March.

It was *Austin Chronicle* critic Michael Corcoran's idea to have bands that hadn't gotten to play the Continental compete on Monday nights. Our mistake was playing the same night as Go Dog Go. They won the contest, but Corcoran wrote, "Ironically, if the show had been judged by an applause-o-meter, Public Bulletin would have advanced. It seems these guys, who look like they met at a Levi's 501 Blues casting call, draw a large group of college students from San Marcos."



I've never known quite what to think about that. I mean, he's right and all. We do look a little too all-American. But God knows we've tried to lose that image. Greg dyed his hair three colors and pierced his ear. Joe dyed his brown hair black and let it grow until his bangs were in his mouth. I, unfortunately, had to cut my hair or lose my job delivering pizza. The Gary brothers consented to grow their hair out to the point where they now only rarely get mistaken for the Hardy Boys.

We were attracting a following in San Marcos, but getting noticed in Austin was the real hurdle. In our hurdle. In our hometown, we commonly recognize over half the people at our shows. We hoped pressing some vinyl might bring out some people who wouldn't come up after the show and ask if we were still going out with so-and-so, or if our families were doing okay.

Publicity was a factor, but we also felt it would be a head rush to put our own record on our own turntable and hear our ownselves.

We asked Zeitgeist's John Croslin to produce the record. We liked their album, and I had gotten to listen to the Croslin-produced Dig tape, which also sounded great.

We ended up with extra studio time, so we went ahead and did a four-song e.p. The studio-to-record-store time span was about four months, but it was worth it.

We called the record "Broke from the Sound," taking the title from the first line of one of the songs. In the context of the e.p., we were dealing with the fact that we couldn't afford to release a record. The idea had been forming in the back of our heads that to properly promote the record and to properly comport ourselves as a "happening" band, it would be necessary to go on tour — just hop in a van and go someplace where nobody had heard of us.

Being the acting manager of the band, I took it upon myself to gather addresses of clubs, send out copies of the record, and call over and over and over trying to get bookings. By the end of July, the Public Bulletin Broke From The Sound tour was set.

The Gary Brothers scientifically customized their new van to hold all of our equipment and still sleep four semi-comfortably. The van was perfect for the tour except that it had spent most of the summer in the shop. The day we were supposed to leave was no exception.

Luckily, the club owner in Jackson was sympathetic. He said we could play a day late and that he could get us a place to stay after the show.

Arriving early the next day, we had about eight hours to kill. Charley immediately started looking for a YMCA in the phone book, hoping he could take the van to go lift weights. We couldn't believe it.

The rest of us were hoping to get back to Texas without disease, but Charley wanted to make sure he got back without losing any muscle tone. We had to lecture him on road band protocol, pointing out that most rock stars drive cars into swimming pools and throw televisions out the windows of their hotel rooms. They don't bop down to the YMCA to pump iron.

After Greg snidely pointed out to Charley that he could get plenty of exercise unloading our equipment — a keen idea, as far as the rest of the band was concerned — Charley backed out of the "weightlifting on tour" idea and just moaned once in a while about his shrinking delts.

We were good that first night in Jackson, and the crowd loved us — all 14 of them. After a few songs a member of the crowd shouted, "Come back on a weekend, and you'll all get laid!"

'We had just crossed over the hobby line.'

A few songs later he yelled again, "Hell, come back on a weekend and you'll get me laid!"

We felt pretty good after the show. We sold a few records, the owner liked us and said he'd get a crowd to the club the next time we played, but we had to drive the next sixteen hours to Raleigh, N.C.

At the Brewery in Raleigh we

(continued on page 46).....

art by William Stelzer

INTERN cont.
the decision was out of the school's hands, meaning it came from somewhere upstairs," he says.

Edmond and Marshall recall a second version of the story, one that is confirmed by John O'Brian, a city official who worked with Marshall: Late last spring, the dean had sent the city a letter explaining Marshall would no longer have a field supervisor, since Naishtat had not been rehired; the letter mentioned Edmond would no longer be working in the neighborhood. At the Blackland Planning Committee meeting in May, O'Brian asked Dean Williams why Edmond would no longer be working in the neighborhood. The dean told O'Brian that Edmond was being pulled because her field supervisor, Naishtat, was leaving, and the school simply couldn't afford a new supervisor.

But Barbara Williams and the dean offer a third, and quite different, account of how Edmond's internship was cut short. Both deny Edmond was removed because of the awkward position it put them in, and both say they never talked to the administration about Edmond. "People are trying to distort the truth for their own purposes," says the dean. "The Administration does not tell the School of Social Work what to do."

Dean Williams also says Edmond misunderstood when her job was scheduled to end. "Tonya Edmond doesn't understand — she doesn't have a history at our school," Williams says. Although the other students in the internship worked through August, "the other interns were all second-year students." Yet the facts don't support Dean Williams's statement. Of the five other interns who have been in the Blackland (two interns have been placed there each of the last three years), three of them were first-year graduate students. And Naishtat and various other professors confirm that while there had been no written agreement over how long Edmond would work in the neighborhood, the understanding (until she was on the evening news and in the *Statesman*) had been that she would work through the summer, just as all the other interns in the Blackland had.

The dean and Barbara Williams say they were never influenced — or even upset — by Edmond's political activities. "Well, I thought it was funny — the dean and I laughed about it," says Barbara Williams. "We were happy about Tonya's performance — you can check her grade. She got an A in her (field) course." Of course, it was Naishtat, not the dean nor Barbara Williams, who graded Tonya Edmond.

In spite of her truncated internship, things haven't turned out badly for Edmond. She remains in the School of Social Work's graduate program and continues to have faith in the value of her work in East Austin. Rather than leave the Blackland, she gave up her stipend, and she now works for the neighborhood center.

Her former co-worker, Jon Marshall, is a little more disillusioned with UT. He left his city-funded field position early, at the beginning of the summer. "I'm wondering if I want to go to school at a place like this," he says.

For Naishtat, a former VISTA volunteer, the stance at the school is simply disappointing. "I really feel that on the Blackland issue, the dean and School of Social Work are coming down on the wrong side. If you don't have the School of Social Work on the side of poor people, who are you?" he says. "I think a school of social work should be willing to take heat — be on the cutting edge."

There's no question that the School of Social Work was acting within its rights when it decided to end Edmond's internship in May rather than in August. Nor has any grievance been filed. But Edmond and many others have lost their faith in the University, believing it will calmly sacrifice its social work students to East Austin expansion. ●

ROCKBAND cont.
opened for a band that sounded something like a cross between Styx and Night Ranger. After the show, we drank free beer and watched while a couple of girls hit on Charley. We whispered to each other about how we might find a YMCA in Raleigh so the rest of the band could start working out.

My twenty-first birthday was spent playing in Knoxville, Tenn. to a packed house. It was one of the most memorable nights in our short career, as well as quite an entrance into symbolic manhood, I thought. When we got to the club, we were greeted by the manager, who told us our dressing room was downstairs.

Having a dressing room was a surprise. Finding a keg of Busch down there made it a historic event. Soon enough, a large gentleman came in and told us he was security, and that we should let him know who we did and didn't want backstage; he would take care of it. Uncomprehending, we stared at him like he was speaking a foreign language.

After checking the marquee and seeing that it was indeed us playing The University Club that night, we hurried back down to the dressing room and started laughing.

We had been getting radio play in Knoxville, and the club had been playing the record; it was strange to see people lip sync and air guitar the songs from the e.p.

After the show, the club owner told us we were the best thing since Elvis and started talking unimaginable sums of money for our return engagement. For our part, we started talking about transferring posthaste to UT — the University of Tennessee.

We pretty much floated to our next show in Baltimore, except for a stop in Washington, D.C. to check out the monuments. After we had walked two miles to see the Washington, Lincoln and Vietnam memorials, the remnants of a hurricane hit Washington. We virtually swam back to the

photo by Pam MacDonald

van. By the time we got to Baltimore, Glenn was so sick he could barely talk.

That show and the next were harrowing experiences. Glenn drank whiskey shots to try to smooth out his voice. It didn't work. I drank lots of beer so I wouldn't care how Glenn sounded. That did work.

By this point in the tour, everyone was annoying everyone. Body odor, musical preferences, restaurant selection, the fact that Charley didn't wear any shirts with sleeves — nothing escaped harrassment.

"I hate your ass!" and "Shut up or I'll hit you in the face!" became popular expressions in the van. Joe had to take most of that shit, partly because he takes shit better than anyone in the band, and partly because, in Louisiana, he hid a turkey and cheese sandwich under the van bed that we didn't find until Raleigh. Joe's a needed spoke in the wheel of an otherwise uptight band. Even when we list our cover version of "Theme from The Good, The Bad and The Ugly" on our set list as "Good, Bad and Joe," he handles it. I think that means Joe's a self-confident guy. Greg, his roommate of four years, thinks it means Joe's a moron.

I had always heard that being in a band is like being married. You see each other's talents and faults. We had known each other for years, but until we started trying to be creative together — with each member having his own idea of how a song should sound — we had not fought like we do now. And the fights are vicious. We know exactly where to hit, and hit we do.

'I was the world's premier phantom Fender guitar god.'

Periodically I ask myself if sticking with the band is worth it. Sometimes I think I might be better off with people I didn't see during off hours. After all, there isn't a member of our band that hasn't thrown a temper tantrum at some point. It's gotten so bad that I've thrown my guitar across our practice room and kicked the door down on my way out.

But there are always the highs.

Sometimes they only last for a few seconds during a show, when we're playing something and we feel it, the energy of the song. We look at each other and know everyone else is feeling it, too. And we remember that it wasn't too long ago that we were huddled around a book of guitar chords trying to make sense of it.

We were hoping our last show on tour would be like that. We were playing at the same club where Prince filmed "Purple Rain." What most people don't realize is that, located in that huge club where Prince went crazy and got nuts, is another club where Hüsker Dü and the Replacements started out. We got a real sense of history just walking in there.

We had a day of rest before the show, and it was enough for Glenn to get his voice back. We had a nice long sound check. We played well.

From the stage we could see close to 50 humanoid figures in the audience, but we couldn't be sure, because they didn't make any noise. None.

After each song, we would stare at each other, make sure our microphones were still on, and break into the next song. We rationalized that we had probably played to zombies, and that we shouldn't feel too badly.

When we got home, it was time to head back to school. We again agreed to play as much as we could during the semester, practicing only on those rare instances when we could make it back to San Marcos.

This whole band thing has taught me a lot, not the least of which is that Roger McGuinn of the Byrds was misleading a whole generation when he wrote "So You Want to Be a Rock and Roll Star" — all that crap about "picking up a guitar and learning to play," and suddenly you're fighting for your creative life with record companies. Bullshit. I've been there. There are quite a few steps between the guitar shop and adoring crowds.

I haven't been on most of those steps yet, but you're only young once, right? So while I still am, I think I'll keep taking twelve hours per semester, keep applying for guaranteed student loans and keep plugging away. I call it the "garage work ethic," and what the hell, if I accidently graduate one day, there's always law school.