

PENCIL STORM

THE OFFICIAL BLOG OF COLIN'S COFFEE

— HOME MUSIC SPORTS R.I.P. MOVIES LIFE COLIN ABOUT —



JEREMY PORTER AND THE TUCOS TOUR DIARY: OCTOBER 12-21, 2023

October 28, 2023 / Jeremy Porter

Eleven years ago when The Tucos started doing more and more road work, I started doing a daily blog on **Facebook** about the day and show the night before. The idea was to capture the spirit of what it's like to be on the road playing the dive bar circuit as a touring band, with basically no following in most places, just a bunch of songs, and the will to get out there. I wanted to document the mundane right along with the exciting, the bad shows next to the good, and everything in between. It's a way to share the experience virtually, shed a little light on what it's "really like," and document the repetitive, Groundhog Day-like routine for myself and anyone who cares to follow along. They're often done in haste, started late at night after a show in some dive motel and finished quickly the next morning before jumping back in the van to get to the next city. There's little time for editing or proofreading. They are what they are.

The experience has grown with the band. I mean, we're not selling out clubs and I'm not a published author, but I hear from friends and strangers all over the place that they read and enjoy them. One guy in West Virginia told me a couple years back that they're the perfect length to read while taking a shit. High praise indeed, from below the Sweet Tea Line.

While I always felt the volume and daily barrage was a bit much for Pencil Storm, **Colin** asked me to compile and share the latest batch, which I'm happy to do. So here's the blogs from our most recent run down to Texas, through the deep south, and back. And if you want a deeper dive, ALL of the blogs dating back to 2013 are **archived HERE** for your next trip to the bathroom. xx



OCTOBER 12, 2023- CHAMPAIGN, IL



Gabriel and I met at my place on Thursday morning and loaded what gear and luggage we hadn't loaded after practice the other night into the van and headed west towards Ann Arbor to pick up **Jacob**. I cranked **The Cars Anthology** as Gabe drove in and out of rain squalls and construction zones until we hit the Indiana border. See ya in 11 days, Michigan. I had a major, traumatic dental event last weekend and had my #26 incisor yanked from my skull with great, unpleasant force on Monday morning, so I'm doing this run with a big hole in my face. I'm trying to do all the right things; staying up on my meds and not mess with it and stay away from the **JuJyFruits**, but we weren't even past Jackson when one of my stitches came out. I didn't panic because it wasn't bleeding or anything, so I texted my super cool dentist Dr. Natalie Henke and she said it's cool just be careful so the show goes on. She knows what's up.

The drive through central Illinois is not an exciting one. We wondered what they do with all the dry, dead corn stalks they're mowing down with their giant machines. Certainly more than Halloween decorations. We listened to **The Posies**, **Mammoth WVH**, **Ultraviolet**, and **Charles Mingus** before putting on locals **Titanic Love Affair** as we headed into the city center of Champaign. We had a couple hours to kill so we stopped into the venue and said hello to the manager and the crew and did a loop around town on foot before settling on dinner at a nearby bar and grill. We got sandwiches and beers, did another lap, got a coffee, took a photo with Humpty Dumpty, and headed back to the bar for load in.

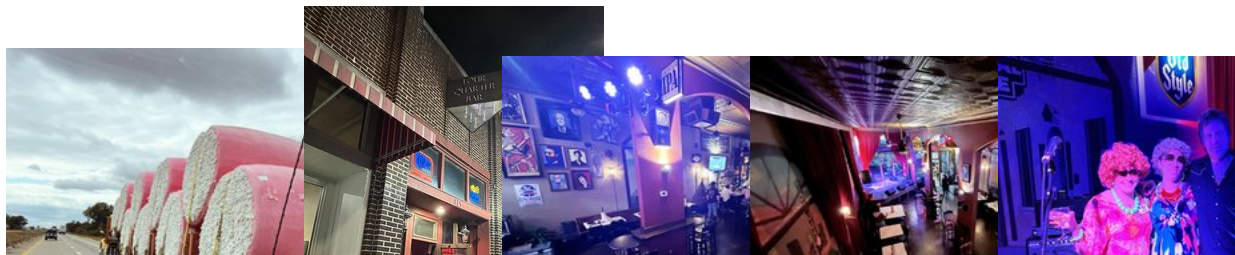
Barrelhouse 34 is a non-venue with a deconstructable stage and rented, mobile pa system and sound engineer. It's a long, raw, exposed wood building with high-tops along one side and a long bar along the other. The stage is set up in the big window facing Main Street, not far from where the old High Dive was, where **TrooperGirl122** and I saw **The Bottle Rockets** many years ago. We loaded in and waited for the staff to finish the stage assembly. I could tell it was going to be a bit so I went for another lap to get a little quiet before the show. "Hey Loser!" I heard from a passing car. My pal, and former mayor of Champaign himself **Don Gerard** was driving by, his little dog yapping and jumping around the back seat. A quick, passing "See ya up there" and he

was off.

Joe Murphy is a friend who I'd met in Yorkville at The Law Office a couple years back, just coming out of the pandemic, if memory serves. He not only helped to get the word out about and posters up for the show, but brought a crue of people, including his lovely wife Kim, friend Chad and several others too numerous to name (but I love you all!). Don Stopped in and caught a good chunk of the show and we made a few new friends too. Our pal Daryl from DeKalb made the trip in, always appreciated! Erik, the colorful and salty sound engineer, fresh off a heart attack a couple weeks ago, got us all dialed in and we went on a few minutes after 8pm. The bar was hopping all night, a little fluctuation at times, but no complaints. People were hollerin' and we had a great time.

Drinks were flowing and the conversation was splendid, but after our set the bar started to thin out, we said goodbye to our friends, tore down, loaded the van, tipped the bar staff, and headed south. We've got a hell of a drive ahead of us today down to North Little Rock, where we'll play the **Four Quarter Bar** tonight, so we got an hour+ behind us last night and made it to Effingham where we crashed. I cranked **Black Sabbath - Volume 4** to help Gabe stay awake and the drive was relatively painless. Champaign was awesome, just as it was nine years ago when we last played there. Thanks to Joe, Kim, Chad, Don, Emily How , Cody, Juan, and so many people how made it memorable. See ya tonight Arkansas! xx

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2023 - NORTH LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS



Before leaving the Ramada Inn in Effingham, Illinois, we each meandered, in our own separate times, to the lobby for the free hotel breakfast of eggs from a plastic bag, grainy weird sausage, coffee and orange juice. The lady who was making sure the bag of eggs was heated thoroughly was overly apologetic that they didn't have any peanut butter for my bagel, but spent a good few minutes selling me on the Cinnamon Toast Crunch flavored peanut butter spread that's on the shelves at Wal-Mart right by the peanut butter. Her sister-in-law made some pumpkin spice cupcakes and my new friend thought it was an opportunity lost not using the CTC spread on them.

I took the wheel as we headed south through Illinois. A bald eagle swooped down and snagged a big piece of roadkill on the side of the northbound lanes and flew away with it in its talons. I

thought it was a squirrel or a bunny, but Gabriel thought it was bigger, maybe a cat or something. Historically when we've seen bald eagles on tour it's been a good omen, most recently when the **Mackinac Bridge** opened back up in time for us to make our gig in **Marquette**, right after we saw one in Mackinaw City. We crossed the **Mississippi River** into Missouri at noon, no signs of Jim or Huck, but the river was lower than I've ever seen it. The sprawling cotton fields were being harvested and semis hauling giant pink and yellow bails were everywhere. At 1:30 we crossed into Arkansas and headed west towards Little Rock. The drive was uneventful save for some digestive events that required stops at various truck stops, as I work to get off these meds I'm on for my extracted tooth. After a brief stopover at our dive motel and a call home to check in on TrooperGirl22 we headed towards the venue. We listened to **Constantines, Valley Lodge, Stiff Little Fingers, R.E.M.** and **Scorpions**.

North Little Rock is a small city that sits on the north bank of the Arkansas River directly above Little Rock proper. **The Four Quarter Bar** sits on Main Street in the Argenta Arts District, an old, eclectic neighborhood and entertainment area. There is a street festival this weekend, so there were tons of people around and parking was a challenge. We met Conan, the owner, who welcomed us to town and showed us around a bit, and Jayson, and Jason, the sound engineer and engineer-in-training with similar names. It's a cool, old building with the sizeable stage in the front corner and a bar in the opposite corner. There's a balcony with chairs and couches where you can hang or watch the bands, and a patio out back if it gets too loud. We ordered food and pints, and it was for sure the best meal we've had on this run yet (not offense, Ramada Inn bag-o-eggs). My pulled pork chimichanga with Cholula and sour-cream sauce on top was right on.

We went on around 9:30 to a fairly packed house of festival goers, happy hour stragglers, and a big wedding party looking to keep the libations flowing. The sound was great and people were into it, but we collectively agreed later that we just weren't on fire. Maybe it was the travel or we just haven't found our tour tour legs yet, but we were missing a little spring in our step.

Near the end of our first set a stream of floral-print moo moos, over-sized sunglasses, and red, permed wigs came in – the **Mrs. Roper Romp**, celebrating the **Three's Company** character. It was a pretty impressive flow of Mrs. Roepers and they were in a great mood and many rocked out with us during our second set. An old pal of mine from the virtual world of Twitter introduced himself, Mike Mozely. We'd had a few, mostly guitar-geek, interactions and he just happened to wander into the bar and see we were playing, having abandoned the platform some time ago. It was a crazy coincidence, and we had a really ice chat, sharing some stories about rock and roll and our friends around the country, like Jeff Brower back in Atlanta.

After our set we mingled a bit, sold some merch, then did the usual tear down, load-out, Load the van, tip Bubba the bartender, and hit the road back to the motel. We watched a little **South Park** and had a nightcap before crashing out around two. Conan, Bubba, Jayson, Jason, Mike, and all the Helen Roepers – THANK YOU for making our first show in Arkansas memorable! Can't wait to come back!

We're a little fried from a couple long drives and long sets, and we've got another one today as we head down to Fort Worth, Texas to play Lola's with our buds **Bottlecap Mountain** and **Broke String Burnett**. We're gonna get Jacob JakeE some **IHOP** in his belly so he can get us down there. There's something special in-store at Lola's tonight folks – you don't wanna miss it if you're a Bottlecaps/Tucos fan. See ya in Texas!!!!

OCTOBER 14, 2023 - FORT WORTH, TEXAS



We started our day off at the **IHOP** in North Little Rock, AR, Arkansas, around the corner from our motel. If you know me, you know that I've never had a bad meal at an iHop. I got my usual, Eggs Benedict, resisting the urge to get something more aggressive that might wreak havoc on my already aggravated bowels. Gabriel got the same but the version that came with spinach and stuff. Both were awesome, but the poached eggs were overdone and there was no liquid yoke, so we were both disappointed. I won't go so far as to say it was `bad,` but they need to do better. The struggle is real, I assure you.

Jacob drove us south, across the **Arkansas River**, through Little Rock, and towards Texarkana and the Texas border. Other than some construction it wasn't a terrible drive until we hit Dallas traffic. We stopped in Fate, Texas, where, as fate would have it, I was destined to get a Sonic Blast milkshake, Recess Peanut Butter Cup flavor. `Cuz that's what a dude with antibiotic-triggered digestive issues needs to calm things down. We cranked out **The Lyres**, **Whiskeytown**, **Coffin Break**, **Porcupine Tree**, **G. Love & Special Sauce**, and more. As we neared our dive motel I blared "Rock Soldiers" by **Ace Frehley** because Jake's never heard it and he's a Rock Soldier, so he needed to. He LOLd into the motel parking lot.

The front desk clerk at this dump tried his best, but what a nightmare. We had some sort of addict derelict try to get into our room and some sort of conflict around the number of beds and then this room was meant for that other guest and I have to charge you for another deposit but I'll refund that one and this whole debacle. We'll just see what gets charged and what gets refunded pal. This ain't The Ritz, so we gotta roll with it to some extent, but JFC. We had grandiose plans to get some Tex Mex at this joint that's 3rd generation owned and been around for 100 years but it was pretty clear we didn't have time so we found a random restaurant near our motel called the **Mexican Inn Cafe** that's at least been around 90 years. I got a combo and a mango margarita and it was really great. I ate too much, too fast, but after the roll we've been

on and my digestive challenges we needed the energy.

We drove through Fort Worth and if I'm being honest, from what I saw, it's a city that's been hit pretty hard. And we're from the Detroit area! No worries, just an observation. We pulled into **Lola's**, met the sound engineer, and unloaded our gear behind the outdoor stage out back. Our plans, Austin's Bottlecap Mountain, pulled up and we quickly fell right back in to where we were when we played with them back in Michigan in March. Great people, lots of road war stories to share, and it was just great to see some familiar faces. They were coming to Fort Worth off a gig in Denton on Friday and their drummer Ray was unable to make the trip. I offered up Gabriel and they accepted, with Gabe's trepidatious blessing of course. He spent the better part of the drive through Illinois, Arkansas, and Texas in the back of the van listening to and charting out the songs that they'd picked. He's always up for a challenge.

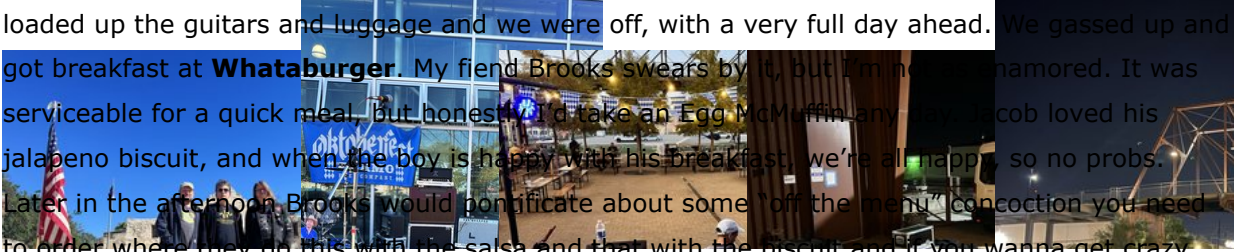
Bottlecap Mountain went on right around 8pm as the night settled in and people started to congregate a bit out back. It was a pretty brisk 60f outside, and this Yankee was a bit chilly, but none of the Texan's were complaining after months of 110f summer heat. They did a few songs as a drummer-less trio then Gabe came out did another 6 with them. He killed it; nailed their set, and they sounded fantastic. We played second to an ok crowd - not packed like we'd like on a Saturday night, but certainly enough people watching to make it fun. We played way better than we did in North Little Rock, which was good, and had a good time up there.

By the time we were done there was a pretty respectable crowd. Locals **Broke String Burnett** and his band went up and did about an hour of original Texas country with a bit of a rock edge. His songs are fantastic and lean a bit on the 70's outlaw country scene, which is right up my alley. His band was super solid and we really enjoyed the set. Great people too - we had a few minutes to talk business and music and some other stuff before we loaded out and headed back to the dive motel. Lola's is a cool place and it was great to get caught up with the Bottlecaps and see Broke Burnett play. Not a bad night at all.

Today is, again, action packed. We're driving to San Antonio for a 5pm show, with a stop in Austin to borrow a couple PA speakers along the way. We've heard nothing but good things about **Alamo Beer Company**, so we're excited about it, but we've also been basically running for three days straight without a moment of downtime, so were a little fried. After today things slow down for a moment, so we'll be able to catch our breath, but it's rock and roll, so let's do it. See ya this afternoon San Antonio! xx

OCTOBER 15, 2023 - SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

First thing Sunday morning was to check the van in the parking lot of our dive motel in Fort Worth to make sure that it and all our gear was still there. It was a cold morning and the riff raff were milling about, but things looked intact, thankfully. I whipped off the road blog, showered,



loaded up the guitars and luggage and we were off, with a very full day ahead. We gassed up and got breakfast at **Whataburger**. My friend Brooks swears by it, but I'm not as enamored. It was serviceable for a quick meal, but honestly I'd take an Egg McMuffin any day. Jacob loved his jalapeno biscuit, and when the boy is happy with his breakfast, we're all happy, so no probs. Later in the afternoon Brooks would pontificate about some "off the menu" concoction you need to order where they do this with the salsa and that with the biscuit and if you wanna get crazy you say "verde" then it's green and all this, but who has time? So I'm batting .000 at Whataburger after two tries, but to be fair I haven't tried a burger yet. Two days in Texas left so who knows?

We made it to Austin in just under three hours and stopped off at Kate and Chris Stangland's house to pick up a couple PA speakers they're loaning us from the Bottlecap Mountain practice space. We met Kate in Michigan back in March and she got us set up in no time, Chris still up north and on the road with the Bottlecaps. Their house is a cool, sort of sprawling ranch in a neat neighborhood not far from the highway and their dog really wanted to meet us, but we didn't have time to socialize, unfortunately. Big thanks to Chris and Kate for the help – it saved us from lugging two giant PA mains across the country for one show.

We drove through what seemed an endless spawl of box stores, travel centers, food chains, and churches nonstop between Austin and San Antonio. One guy had a license plate on his Honda Civic that said **RADDUDE**. We cranked the Bottle Rockets' Songs of Sahn record, which seemed appropriate. This was our first time in San Antonio and it seems the thing to do is to see **The Alamo**. Ever since I was a kid I heard about the Alamo and **Davy Crockett** and all that, and until you lay eyes on those types of things it's just sort of some conceptual thing that is difficult to actually realize. Well, call me naive, but I figured we'd pull up, jump out, snap a couple pics, grab a souvenir magnet for the refrigerator and be on our way. Nope. It was a quagmire of humanity and traffic, multiple trips around blocks, scoffing at \$25 for two hour parking, and some pretty colorful language. We eventually found a slightly less expensive parking option that was very close and walked over, got our pictures and magnets, nodded our heads, said "yup." and moved on. Jake wasn't impressed.

A short mile away is the Alamo Beer Company, where the show was. We drove around the back alley and backed right up next to the stage to unload. The stage is in a courtyard/patio area between the taproom and brewing buildings, with string lights and a giant railroad overpass converted to a pedestrian path overhead. It's a really cool setting and the weather was great – low 70s and sunny. There was karaoke going on in the adjacent yard of the compound, and this little dude killed "Jackson" (most famously done by **Johnny and June Carter Cash**) before some poor lass murdered the "Whole New World" song from some Disney movie I'll never see. Someone wrapped up with the **Nirvana** version of "The Man Who Sold the World" and I'd bet dollars to doughnuts that cat had no idea it was a **Bowie** song. It was all good, people were having fun, and who am I to judge.

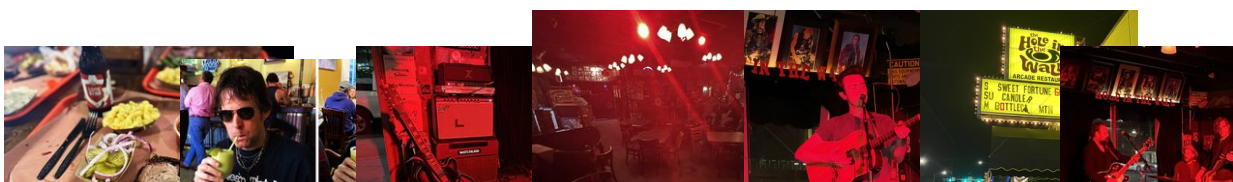
We got all set up, including the PA, had some food and pints, and went on around 5pm. Sunday-Wednesday shows on tour are always hit and miss, and often a bit weird. This one was on the better side for sure. There weren't a ton of people, but there were enough to keep it fun, and they were engaged and responsive. The above-mentioned Brooks and our pal Jose drove up from the Houston area, Gabriel's cousin Liz and her husband showed up, and some cat named Mike from Minnesota via England was there who was most complimentary and pleased with the music. He was disappointed that our last song "Double Negative" wasn't available on any albums yet, heck, we've only played it a couple times now, but he picked up a couple CDs and promised to watch out for it on the next record.

We wrapped up at 8 as it was getting dark and the crowd was thinning out. Last-call pints were poured, I talked some guitars and amps with Jose, who's a big **Stevie Ray Vaughan** fan, and we tore down the whole shebang - PA, lights, amps and drums. It really is a beautiful, urban, industrial setting, complete with regular passing freight trains and a view of the skyline in the near distance. Our trusty GPS companion **Karen Jacobsen - The GPS Girl** got us back on the freeway with Gabriel at the wheel and Jake cranking an early Fastball album. We stopped for fuel at a sketchy AF Circle K and I foolishly bought this thing called a **Sponch**, which is apparently "Marshmallow cookies coconut and strawberry" and immediately had massive buyer's remorse. We'll report back on that later. But what is it with these ghetto travel centers? They have pints of chocolate milk, strawberry milk, Froot Loops milk, Cinnamon Toast Crunch milk...but no goddamn white milk?

From there it was a couple blocks inland to our AirBB where we'll have a base for the next 36 hours, a welcome stretch of no travel and causal downtime after four straight days of nonstop movement, shows, and activity. We're doing fine, but a bit fried and in need of a few hours of chill. San Antonio was a fun adventure, and you can't complain for a Sunday show. Thanks to everyone at the Alamo Beer Company for being so nice to us (and thanks to everyone at the actual Alamo too I suppose).

Not sure what today will hold, maybe guitar and record shopping? Tonight we're playing our second show ever in Austin, this time at **HOLE IN THE WALL**, back with our pals Bottlecap Mountain again. We're ready to be back in a dive bar, and ready for a rockin' 45 minute set. Tucos up second of three. See ya there! xx

OCTOBER 16, 2023 - AUSTIN, TEXAS



Monday morning was our first opportunity to sleep in and not have to rush out of town in five

days. I was still at it pretty early, but the downtime was nice. The boys crashed out `til around 11 while I published the blog and went for a nice long walk up from our AirBB and through a couple neighborhoods. I saw lots of prickly pears cactus and giant aloe plants, a homeless encampment in the woods, and some massive drainage canals, dry to the bone. It's so dry here. We're all coughing and just parched, looking forward to the humidity of Alabama tomorrow. I was disappointed, however, to not see an armadillo or any lizards.

When I got back Jacob was researching lunch options, always on the lookout with a great track record of finding killer food. We also wanted to bop around Austin a bit. We went to **Terry Black's Barbecue** and there was a line out the door. The boy was determined, and the line moved really fast so no probs. I got a half pound of brisket and a couple pork ribs with a side of pintos and a side of mac and cheese. I've had BBQ all over the place and know my way around a grill and a smoker a bit myself, but I have to say this was the best I've ever had. The bark on the brisket was amazing. The ribs had a slight sweetness to them. The mac and cheese was the perfect amount of creamy, and the noodles were not overdone, and the pinto beans, holy smokes – incredible flavor. The meal lasted me until 2am.

We left Terry Black's and walked of our lunches as much as we could in a couple of Austin's popular neighborhoods. There really wasn't a whole lot to see on 2nd Avenue or 6th Street for us, to be honest. We did see where **Austin City Limits** is filmed and some of the legendary bars that have made Austin one of the music meccas of the USA. Other than that it was a couple stores and some sidewalk. We hit **End of an Ear** record store on our way back to the AirBB, which is a store Gabriel and I visited in 2014, last time we were here. I got a **Cheap Trick** pin and Gabriel got an album. Back at the AirBB we had a couple hours before we had to head into town so we just sorta crashed out and did our own things for a bit, again very appreciative of the downtime, knowing also that it would be at least a couple days before it happens again.

We headed back into the city to meet up with our friends in Bottlecap Mountain and have a pre-show beverage, and about 10 minutes in to Austin rush hour traffic Gabriel asked me if I'd grabbed my guitars from the AirBB. Nope, shit. We had to turn around and grab them, and it was a pain in the ass, let me tell you. Not the end of the world, but a rookie mistake. It went quickly and we were soon at **Curra's Grill**, recreating the same event from nine years ago, sipping on an **avocado margarita** with friends. Sounds weird but they're amazing (the avocado margaritas, not the friends. Well, the friends are amazing too, but I was... nevermind). It was nice, too, to get to hang with our friends in Bottlecap Mountain again outside of the context of a show, where there's gear to schlep, set up, tear down, and play on. I was thankful that **Stewart Gersmann** had the idea and invited us out.

An hour later and a 10 minute drive away we parked behind the HOLE IN THE WALL to load in, and a big THUNK resonated from the roof of the van. There was a massive branch hanging from the tree, seemingly ready to emancipate itself, but almost invisible because of how high up it was and how it camouflaged in the leaves and the Austin night. Seemed no damage done, but a bit of

a wtf moment.

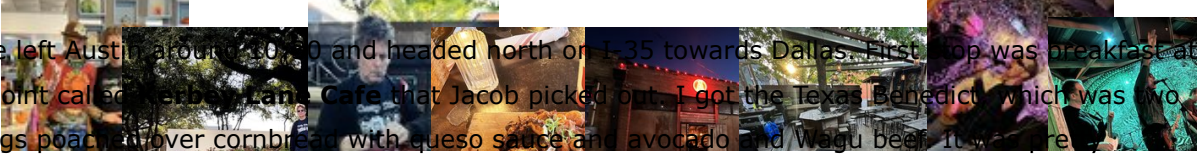
The Hole in the Wall is a great rock and roll dive bar. We felt right at home in this place. A bit dirty, stickers everywhere, half broken down gear, a well worn in stage, and a salty but friendly staff who'd seen a million bands come and go. There's a big room in the back that's probably good for at least a couple hundred people, but we played in the front, better suited for a Monday night show. We used some of the house gear and got set up pretty quickly and settled in for a drink. Brooks and Jose from Houston were again in attendance, for the second night. My pals **Dan Whitaker** and his wife **Megan** came out. We'd met in Chicago when we did a show together right as the pandemic was starting to ease up and bumped into each other a couple times sense. My friend Philip came out, who I'd met in Madison, Wisconsin when we played there about 10 years ago, and once in California since, great dude, and always supportive. And there were more – friends from Twitter Heather and Amber were there, rocking out till the end. And a ton of people I don't know. Very sorry if I missed anyone, it's a little hazy to be honest. We had a great crowd for our set, felt we played well, and it was a super fun night. **Wesley Maffly-Kipp** opened with a great set of solo-acoustic originals, and Bottlecap Mountain played after us and destroyed the joint with the best set I've seen them play yet (and they're always great). Rockin', high-energy, great sound, clear harmonies... just killer all around.

We spent at least another hour hanging out and talking to our old and new friends. Brooks has some new breakfast plan for us involving some other local chain and some custom concoction you have to order a certain way and well, we'll see what happens. Drinks were flowing and spirits were very high all around after an awesome night – one of the best Mondays ever. We said goodbye to everyone and it's always a little tough after a couple fun nights, but we'll see the Bottlecaps out there again some day for sure. Great bond with that crüe and grateful to call them friends. Back at the AirBB Jacob made us each a bowl of ramen noodles to sop up the libations and we crashed out around 3am.

Today we've got an unusually short drive up to Dallas where we'll play the **Armoury, D.E.** in Deep Ellum tonight with The Mullens and Long Black Car. Looking forward to rocking out with those dudes and wrapping up the Texas leg of the tour in style, and seeing some close friends. I've got nasty, crusty guitar strings to change and might try to do it before we leave, time permitting. If you're following along and wondering where we stand with the missing tooth and medication issues, I finished the antibiotics yesterday and hope the stomach issues will start to settle down. Signs are pointing in the right direction there.

THANK YOU to everyone who was a part of last night. So much fun, best night of the run so far, and we love and appreciate each of you! Xx

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2023 - DALLAS, TEXAS



We left Austin around 7:30 and headed north on I-35 towards Dallas. First stop was breakfast at a joint called **Wagon Lane Cafe** that Jacob picked out. I got the Texas Benedict which was two eggs poached over cornbread with queso sauce and avocado and Wagyu beef. It was pretty awesome. Dude named **Zion** who worked there, all dressed in crazy colors and stuff, came over and introduced himself and we had a nice chat about Detroit rock and roll and snapped a photo.

I've started this thing where ever since we saw The Alamo on Sunday I play the theme from the Davy Crockett show when we get into the van on the stereo. The boys don't seem to like it much but that makes it even more fun. This has the potential to go on for years. Monday night got away from us a little bit and we, especially me, were all a little worse for the wear. I nodded in and out for most of the drive. Jacob and Gabriel Doman have each developed a medium size case of road rage since we've been in Texas, thanks to the driving habits of these people here. It gets a little crazy sometimes.

We checked into our dive motel east of the city and to absolutely no surprise it did not go without a hitch. Gabe's room was sans any linens whatsoever (including sheets) and the Mexican maid didn't speak enough English to help, despite her honest and charming efforts. Eventually he got it sorted and we headed into the city. Traffic was a bear as I cranked **Joan Jett and The Blackhearts**.

First stop was a bucket-list goal for many years – **Dealy Plaza**, the site of the assassination of **President John F. Kennedy**. To set the mood I played my two favorite songs about the event: **"Dallas 1PM"** by **Saxon** and **"The American in Me"** by **The Avengers**. The boys show great patience with me and my detour excursions. They'd be just as happy to skip it and head to the venue for a cold one and early load in. We paid \$10 to park and walked a couple blocks to the sacred ground, with 2 "X"s on the street where each bullet hit. It is a bizarre feeling to stand in a spot you've seen a million times on TV but never actually in person. We snapped a few pics of the window of the building that **Oswald** (supposedly) shot Kennedy from, the grassy knoll, some surrounding monuments and fountains, looked at each other with the same look we had at the Alamo, said "yup, ok," and walked back to the van.

We drove the couple short miles to the **Deep Ellum** district of Dallas, a freed-man's area after the Civil war turned into an entertainment center with music venues, restaurants, tattoo parlors, and stuff like that. The Armoury, D.E. sits in the middle of it all, and is a super cool joint. It's got a sort of Hungarian/Transylvanian theme, including the menu, with weird Dracula art all over the place. We set up on the stage on the patio out back and ordered some food. I got the **Pannonia Charred Octopus**, served with potatoes and Hungarian bologna and paprika dip and a Lone Star tall boy. It was amazing!

I took a quick lap around the neighborhood to help the food digest, called TrooperGirl22 who was in a bit of sticker shock about some mail that showed how much my new tooth implant is going to cost us, but still unwavering in her insistence that she'll not be seen with a toothless rock star

for the rest of her life. Back at the Armoury my close, dear friends Jeff and Amy White showed up. They're two of my favorite people, even though they're republicans, and the rare times we can actually hang out are really special. We had a few laughs and a couple drinks. Jeff and I talked some **Cowboys** and **Lions**, and I made sure he knows that he's not great at giving gambling advice (jk haha). Another friend of mine from my high school days in Marquette, Wanda, showed up with her boyfriend Travis and I'd not seen her for over a decade, so that was amazing too! Pretty soon the Amy camp and the Wanda camp were acquainted and getting along stellarly.

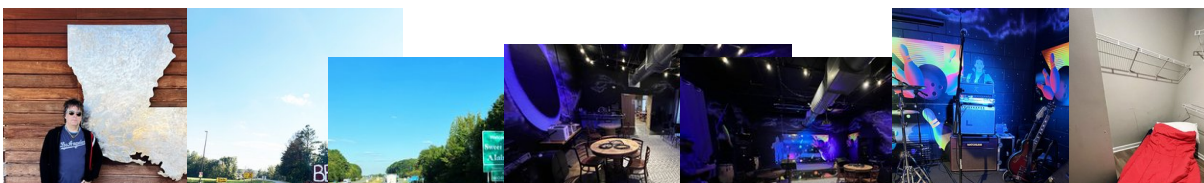
Up first were Long Black Car, a five piece punk rock band in the fashion of a dirty **Rolling Stones** meets the **Dead Boys**. They were each super nice dudes and they put on a fantastic show. Their singer was jumping on tables and running around like he was at **The Greystone** in **Detroit** back in the 80s. It was awesome. We played second to a pretty decent crowd, especially for a Tuesday night. I'm having some hear issues with my rig and really need a few minutes that I haven't had to tighten some bolts and lock down some pedals. Other than that we played pretty well and had a blast up there. After us was **The Mullens**. These guys were a little less punk, but still had elements of that. They reminded me of **The Lyres** from Boston, and an edgy version of **The Kinks**. They're just back from a California run and tight as hell, with great songs and a pro stage presence. Great band, and we were honored to play between them and Long Black Car.

We sold a little merch, packed up, and loaded out. I traded a few war stories with our waiter Jeremy who'd played Michigan a few times himself. I bid a teary and emotional goodbye to Amy and Jeff, who were fit to be poured into an Uber and back to their hotel, and Wanda and Travis, who were so cool to make it out on a school night to hang with us. I love you all!

Jake took the wheel and got us out of Dallas. We were on fumes so we stopped at a 24 hour Fuel City and got gas and tacos before we made it back to our dive motel in Terrell, Texas. THANKS to The Armoury, The Mullens, Long Black Car, and everyone who was there!

We're off to Tuscaloosa now, leaving Texas after four fun shows. It's gonna be a marathon drive today and I'll be at the wheel. I intend to play as much heavy metal as possible. See ya tonight at Druid City Brewing Company for a couple sets as we start to work our way back east! Thanks for reading, rushing to leave town today so sorry for any typos. xx

OCTOBER 18, 2023 - TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA



We left our dive motel in Terrel, Texas (pronounced like Darryl, not tear-elle, as my Texas friends

quickly pointed out) at an early 9am after a late, rambunctious night in Dallas with a daunting 8+ hour drive staring us down. I took the wheel and did the drive without any issue. We hit the Louisiana border at noon and the Mississippi border at 2pm. Crossing the **Mississippi River** into Vicksburg was alarming. The river is so low that there's about 100 or more yards of sand on each shore, exposing what should be underwater in normal times. I've crossed this river more times than I can count and I've never seen it this low. When **SlugBug** toured in the 90s we played **Saint Louis** on the heels of a great flood, with the water about 2 steps below the foot of the arch. This is the polar opposite. We gulped down some Arby's along the way and saw a nearby combo mobile-meth-lab-BBQ-joint-used-tire encampment in the adjacent woods. Hell yeah, Mississippi! Gabriel was intrigued (about each element), I was scared.

Anyhow, it was a beautiful day, the drive was pleasant and spirits were high. The boys napped a bit and we cranked all sorts of tunes – **James Brown, Big Thief, All**. I cranked **Grim Reaper's See You In Hell** album that I ripped from vinyl last week for just such an occasion. Not sure Jacob was impressed but Gabriel didn't seem to mind. As we crossed into Alabama I put on a **Jason Isbell** playlist I made of my favorite stuff from his solo albums and got the feels a little bit connecting some of those lyrics into my own life and the people around me. Something about listening to "Alabama Pines" while you're actually driving through Alabama pines... Good music does that. Roadkill sightings included a fox, a deer, an opossum, a raccoon, and a couple armadillos. Gabriel got eyes one armadillo looking to cross the freeway, most likely adding to that toll for future drivers.

We checked into our dive motel on the south side of Tuscaloosa a little after five and were surprised to see the accommodations a good couple grades up from our normal dive motels. The two suns even shine on a wamprat's ass some of the time I guess. We'll forgive them for only having decaf in the room, settling for some nice, clean beds and space to stretch out. No time for dallying though, a quick splash of the face and change out of the civvies into show gear and it was off the venue.

We played **Druid City Brewing Company** last year, almost to the day, and had a great time. Sunday through Wednesday is always tough on tour, so you set expectations accordingly and just hope for the best. A small handful of people is often the best you can do, and frankly we over-achieved in Austin and Dallas earlier this week. We were greeted by a couple familiar faces and bellied up to the bar for food and pints. Operations have moved since last year, across the street. We weren't playing on a cement floor in front of the beer vats now, it was a legit band room with a killer PA, a stage, lights, and cosmic murals ceiling to floor. I got what amounts to their meat-lovers pie with all sorts of beef and pork on it, and added raw onions. Great thin-crust pizza! The red IPA was Jake and my favorite. I called TrooperGirl22 while the boys were finishing up dinner and got caught up about what's up in Michigan and it seems like the world is still turning above the sweet tea line.

We loaded in and sound-checked. My gear is in varying states of falling apart so I did what I

could to do as far as some maintenance, but I really need some serious time to deal with it. The nut has fallen off of my **Orange** ABY switch – it's been stripped since we left but not it's just gone. My **Wampler** Paisley overdrive pedal is fading in and out at random. I zip-tied it into place but it only helped a little so I will try replacing the patch tonight. And one of the nuts holding my guitar stand is missing so the bolt is barely hanging on. We're gonna try to get to a Home Depot today to get that fixed. Can't have your guitar stand falling apart.

On a more optimistic note I've clearly rounded the corner on my emancipated tooth antibiotic-induced digestion issues, which is something I'm very grateful to have behind me, but I snagged my already torn-up fingernail and ripped a corner of it off, leaving some exposed flesh beneath and a little spur of hard skin that sends a sharp pain through my hand whenever it comes in contact with anything. It seems a little better this morning, but holding a pick was a bit of a challenge last night.

We played for about an hour and a half last night. There weren't many there, but we did have some bodies in the room and a few more coming in and out throughout the set to check us out. It's a LOUD room, and they seemed grateful that we offer up free earplugs at our merch table. Not much else to say about that – these weeknights are what they are and you just do what you can. Bo and his staff (and patrons) at Druid City are some of the friendliest around. They all remembered us from last year and were so welcoming. One dude was so pleased with his skulls tee shirt he got last year – he said he "wore the shit out of it" and it still looks great. Thanks for carrying the torch dude! Can't find a better place for a weeknight show, and we'll certainly be back if they'll have us.

I drove back to the dive motel, which makes sense after brewery gigs as I'm not a big beer guy. It was abnormally early – not even 11pm yet – so we fired up some tunes, poured a whiskey, and hung out for an hour before crashing out. I got a solid 7 hours of sleep, which was needed and welcome. Lobby coffee now, and some bookwork before we head out. Three more nights – Memphis, Lexington, and Akron. Super excited to play Growlers tonight in Memphis with The Eastwoods and Orion Overstreet. Jake's already talking BBQ again, and I'm half hoping to get a peek at the Lorraine Motel if it's convenient, but I haven't told the boys yet so shhhh.

Xx JP

OCTOBER 19, 2023 - MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE



Our day started with breakfast at the **IHOP** in Tuscaloosa. If you know me, you know I've never had a bad meal at an Ihop. This time they got the poached eggs right – nice and runny. It was a

perfectly good meal. A final coffee and a little flirting with the waitresses and we jettied across the street to Lowe's to get some hardware to fix my self-destructing guitar stand. Jacob and I went in, grabbed a wing nut, a bag of locking washers, and a few bolts (just in case) and from there we pointed the van north for the beginning of our three-night journey home. I fixed the guitar stand in route while Gabriel was driving and we rocked out to some **L'Rain, Robbie Fulks, Teen Jesus and the Jean Teasers**, then heading into Memphis, **Lucero** (of course) and **Jason Ringenberg**.

Our AirBnb was a complicated puzzle of keypad gates and doors, elevators, hallways, stairs, parking permits, and rollaway beds. It's also bright pink with a giant leather princess chair and neon signs that say "hellogorgerous" and "You're Like...Beautiful." Jake's taking the retro art-deco couch, Gabriel's got the bedroom, and I'm taking the rollaway. It was shaping up to be a long night. We wasted no time and headed out for some Memphis BBQ.

The **Cozy Corner BBQ** is a cinder block and corrugated metal structure down a lonely city road just off downtown Memphis. We ordered various incarnations and quantities of ribs and ate like kings for a few minutes. I'd eaten and **Rendezvous Ribs** many years ago with TrooperGirl22 and we didn't love it. These were great and I'd go back again for sure.

From there we drove over to **Growler's**, our venue for the night. It was the dojo where **Elvis** practiced karate for a time, and it's still owned by the same sensei and has a lot of the same décor. Bryson, the promoter for the show, had a pretty amazing set of photos he showed me of Elvis and his sensei, and one of **Chuck Norris** and **Bruce Lee** in the building. It's a great room with a sizeable stage in the corner and a bar along two walls. We loaded in, met the staff, including our sound engineer Jay, and sound-checked. It sounded awesome. We talked to the other band a bit, **The Eastwoods**, and opener **Orion Overstreet** who went on a little after eight. The crowd was sparse, and it wasn't the winner show we were hoping for. We've started a version of the **Drive-By Truckers'** song "Decoration Day" called "Explanation Day" with each verse citing lines we've heard about empty clubs. "It's explanation day... all the bars are slow today..." "There's a festival in town today..." "It's always quiet this time of years..." "It was packed last Saturday..." "**Archers of Loaf** are playing their reunion show on the next block..." "There's a street festival and everyone's tired..." We've heard `em all. Anyhow, Orion was wonderful – singing her operatic folk music with an acoustic guitar and a banjo.

After us The Eastwoods went on and we really dug those guys. They reminded me of *Dirty South*-era Drive-By Truckers and had some other cowpunk, alt-country, and southern rock influences too. Guitarist Connor plays a mean slide that adds a cool element to their sound, and singer Kyle leads the rodeo through the set. Their stuff sits perfectly with a good chunk of my record collection. We had a good chat afterwards and vowed to play together again, hoping for a better result.

We loaded out, licked our wounds, and scurried back to our AirBnB, where a healthy rat was

running around between cars as we walked in. There was some feasting on leftovers (us, not the rat), and a quick nightcap before crashing out. "Let's check out this rollaway." Crack-clunk-bang. Crooked, tilty and rickety. Missing 2 of the wheels, so it rocked front to back. The end legs wouldn't lock into the brackets. Unsleepable. I set up the one in the storage closet, which was much more stable, and slept in there. Honestly...I've slept on worse beds for sure. It was weird sleeping in a prison cell isolation unit-like dark room with absolutely nothing in it, but I got a few hours.

Not too much exciting to write about today. The travel was routine and show was a drag for the most part. They're not all winners, and it's not all hookers, drugs, and parties, folks. We're glad we met The Eastwoods and here's to a better show next time. We loved the room and wouldn't even rule out a return there.

Today we're off to our favoritest road city **Lexington, Kentucky**. Can't wait to see my brother **NP Presley** and hear his new band and hang with our many friends there. We are due for a winner, so let's do this Lexington! Xx

OCTOBER 20, 2023 - LEXINGTON, KENTUCKY



Before we left out AIrBB in Memphis I darted over to see the **Lorraine Motel**, which was a couple blocks from where we were staying. It's sacred ground, the location of the assassination of **MLK**, and a spot I've not been able to visit on my many previous times in Memphis. It's now attached to a museum and somewhat converted to a monument to civil rights, but preserved very well and easily accessible. I took a few photos and tried to take in the moment before heading back to scoop up the boys. It's not lost on me that touring has afforded me the ability to see so many great and important places, and I try not to take it for granted.

We were on a fairly downer roll after a couple slow nights and a lot of driving so what better to lift the spirits than another seven-hour drive and a shitty fast food breakfast? We got to **McDonalds** at 10:31am and sorry, it's a Big Mac or squat. We got coffees and went over to **Wendy's** where yay! They're still serving breakfast! We stood there for at least 10 minutes while the kid behind the counter leaned up against the fryer looking at his phone, listening carefully for his approaching manager so he could act busy. Every employee looked at us but no one could be bothered to tell the person who was to take our order to do just that. Eventually she came out and said "We ain't servin' that. It's after 10:30. What you want?" as we looked up at the menu off breakfast sandwiches and hash brown sticks. Eventually they flipped them over to burgers and chicken sandwiches. She wrote our orders down on paper, took it away with Gabriel's credit card, and brought the card back a minute later, no receipt, no words, just thanks for your money

sucker. Not what we wanted but we were already 40 minutes into this miserable debacle and we had miles to make up, so I got TrooperGirl22's favorite – the **Son of Baconator**. It sucked – dry and cold, void of taste, and just plain pathetic. Knowing her standards, they have to normally be better than that. Not the attitude adjustment we needed.

Jacob drove through **Nashville**, out of **Tennessee**, into **Kentucky**, past the **National Corvette Museum** with the sinkhole, through Lexington, and up to our dive motel in **Georgetown**. We got a free glazed donut at some BP/donut shop for filling up the van, so thought I'd ride that potential wave of changing good fortune and added in a couple **Betty Boop** scratch-offs. First one was a dud. I'll do the second today. We checked in to the motel, changed and headed back into the city to meet our pal J Tyler for dinner at a local institution – Winchell's. We go way back with J Tyler, from when he was in **Those Crosstown Rivals**, and we toured together back in 2014. It's always great to see him and the conversation is never dull. He's got a way with words, and when I told him I was eyeing up the **fried oyster po' boy** but I was concerned about lingering digestion issues, he said "Sounds to me like you got nothing to lose!" so that was that. The last two fried oyster po' boys I got were terrible, so I was trepidatious, but it was really great – hot and bulky and super yum.

Over at The Green Lantern Bar there were a line of dudes waiting to help us load in. Aaah Kentucky, you always rule! That went quickly and we arranged our stuff and set up whatever we could before the show started. Bumped into many friends – Jake and D'Arcy, Chandler **Tex Dynamite**, and my brother Nate NP Presley. I love these people and Lexington has always been our second home. First up was **Haiku Seppuku**, which is Tex' new band, with Nate on drums. It was their first show and they played a short, killer set of alternative/punk that reminded me at times of **Jawbreaker**. Great stuff! Next up was **Mayking**, Nate now playing bass. These guys were a bit less punk and a bit more indie sounding, with a Moog keyboard in the middle. They were well rehearsed and had great songs and arrangements – another fantastic set from another new Lexington band!

We went on around 11 to a great crowd and did our best to burn the joint down. People were cheering and singing along, raising beers and throwing devil horns, and rooting us on. We had a blast up there and called some location-specific audibles. As always, we closed with our tribute to the people of Lexington – "**Hey Kentucky**" – with an audience participation outro. Super awesome!

Highlights of playing this area are never complete until we see our buds **Vibrolas** – Leila and Chris. We go back with them over a decade too, and they're awesome people. This time, however, there was extra cause to celebrate as Chris presented me with a refurbished **Silvertone** guitar that he's been working on for me for, well... a long time. I couldn't believe it. It's a work of art, he did an AMAZING job, and it made me sooo happy to finally lay hands on it! I paid \$10 for the neck and body when I was in high school and it spent many winters in a frozen garage in Marquette, Michigan – hardly a place you'd want to store a stringed instrument. I gave it to him when we did

a Michigan run with them back in 2014 and said "do what ya' can, man" and all expectations and hopes were exceeded. It needs a little break-in time before it'll see a stage, but maybe next weekend in Detroit. Dude, THANK YOU!

Back at the motel we've now got six guitars to take into the room. We had a nightcap and wished our TV worked. We needed a win after a couple stinkers and Lexington never, ever disappoints. THANK YOU to the **Green Lantern**, the bands, Nate, and all our friends who were there, too many to mention. You are a huge part of this band and we love you.

As we were getting ready to crash, just after 3am, Jake noticed that the headlining band for our show tonight in Akron, Ohio – the last show of our tour – has cancelled. That's a kiss of death for a touring band in a new city, but the show will go on and we'll do our best. Another kick in the nuts, and another line for our DBT parody song "Explanation Day." I try to give you guys the shit right next to the glory, and there's pretty much equal or more parts shit. Thing happen, you gotta roll with it. See ya tonight Akron – let's wrap it up in style! Xx

OCTOBER 21, 2023 - AKRON, OHIO



We left our dive motel in Georgetown, Kentucky a bit worse for the wear, but in high spirits after the much needed great show in Lexington the night before. We had breakfast at the adjacent **Waffle House**, or the "Awful Waffle," as it's called if you're in the know. It had been a while. The food wasn't bad but the place was filthy – every surface was sticky – the floor, the counter, the laminated-place mat menus, the cups and mugs. Anyhow, it went down ok and we were soon on our way north with me at the wheel, Gabriel at shotgun, and Jacob in the back. They were both out pretty quick so I put on **Juliana Hatfield's** *Only Everything* album, popped Fantasy-flavored **HI-CHEW**s every 15 minutes to keep me awake, and drove over the **Ohio River, Cincinnati**, and **above the Sweet Tea Line** for the first time in a week and a half. We've had blue, sunny skies since we crossed the Sweet Tea line into Missouri last Friday, and like clockwork, they turned grey and rainy when we crossed back over yesterday. The boys woke up around **Columbus** and it wasn't long before we were checking into our dive motel north of **Akron**. The clerk tried to pull some "You can't get the member price on two rooms" horse shit on me but I wasn't having it, having done that in the 100s of times before. He acquiesced and we settled in for an hour or two.

Dinner options were limited so we ended up at this sports bar and grill called On Tap Medina I had a turkey and Swiss on a pretzel bun that wasn't bad, and we watched Iowa win over

Minnesota in the final seconds of the game. 20 minutes down the road and we were loaded into **Buzzbin**. This venue used to be in **Canton, Ohio**, and we played there a few years ago. Our pal Scott was on the sidewalk to greet us and inside we were happy to see Dawn and Elizabeth and say hello to Brian Lisik and his band. It's on older building in the Kennmore neighborhood of Akron, a long room with a bar on the left side and a tall stage against the front. They had the **Replacements'** Saturday Night Live poster hanging and played cool 80s punk for house music.

There was a local headliner booked to play the show but they unexpectedly cancelled, as we found out via a Facebook post at 3am the night before. When you're a touring band in a new city and the local headliner cancels, it's pretty much a kiss of death, so we knew we were now heading into a slow night. **Brian Lisik and Hard Legs** bassist wasn't able to make the show but they showed up to play anyway, which we were very grateful for. They have some smart tunes with good hooks and Brian is a solid singer. Their guitarist Rob plays a **Dr. Z amp**, like me, and we bonded over tone for a bit. We'll be crossing paths with them again sometime, and while they sounded great, I'll be looking forward to seeing them with a bassist!

We played after them and did our best to rock the joint despite the barren landscape. We always try to never phone it in, if there's three people there or 300. We felt like we played pretty well and it sounded ok. The microphone I was using had a windscreen (the grill-like ball at the end) that was frayed and torn and mid-set it caught the edge of my nostril as I sang a line and pulled away. That hurt like holy hell and I was seeing stars for a second, but the show goes on. After the set we sold a little merch, which we're always grateful for, mingled a bit with our friends and the owner, Julia, who was dressed like **Uma Thurman** from **Kill Bill**, had a nightcap, loaded out and headed back to our motel.

Back in our room I heated up my leftover macaroni & cheese from dinner and left it in a little too long melting the Styrofoam a bit. Oh well, down the hatch. Probably not going to be what kills me. We watched a little **Harold and Kumar** and crashed out around 2am. This morning I went out to load up the guitars (we always bring the guitars into our room overnight) and had to back the van out a little to open the back doors. Hmm, that's odd – says the rear passenger door is open. Yup, the side door to the van was wide open all night, leaving our gear exposed for anyone to help themselves. Holy Christ that could have been a disaster, and I was so grateful nothing was gone. I was sitting back there on the drive back from the bar, so I guess it's on me. That's a first, and hopefully a last. We grabbed a quick breakfast at McDonalds and now we're on the Ohio Turnpike heading back towards Michigan.

And that's a wrap on our October tour. Pretty typical in the end, with the first 2/3 being pretty solid but three of the last four shows not being great. We drove through 10 states, crossed the **Mississippi River** twice, played 10 shows in 10 days, ate some incredible food, saw some great friends and made a few more, saw some armadillo road kills, a giant bald eagle, the Alamo, Dealy Plaza, and the Lorraine Motel. We're very much looking forward to getting home to our homes, wives, beds, and lives. But here's to rock and roll. It ain't always pretty but we ain't done

yet. Thanks for reading. Xx



Jeremy Porter lives near Detroit and fronts the rock and roll band **Jeremy Porter And The Tucos**. Follow them on Facebook to read his road blog about their adventures on the dive-bar circuit.

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