

*Surviving in Leather,
Bristles, Studs, Punk
Rock, and G.B.H*



CITY BABY



ROSS LOMAS

with Steve Pottinger



Colin and Ross, Irving Plaza, New York, 11/6/87 FRANK WHITE

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SUNDAY MAY 26
7:30 P.M.

H.C. PRESENTS

G.B.H.

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DRUGS PARTY IN 526

NONE OF US HAD BEEN ABROAD BEFORE, so heading to Holland was going to be an adventure. Before we left Brum, we each picked up a one-year British visitor's passport that you could get at your local post office until the 1990s. It was just a folded bit of cardboard with your photo, and was enough to get you around all of Western Europe. With those tucked safely in our pockets, carrying our instruments with us, we took the train out of New Street, down to London and on to Harwich.

From Harwich, we caught the overnight ferry to De Hoek in Holland. Being a group of lads with time on our hands, all excited about going abroad, we spent the whole time drinking. Our mate Lumberjack, who had come along for the *craic*, the good times, he fell asleep out on deck with his trousers around his ankles. Naturally, we gathered around him, laughing and shouting and taking the piss. Even in June, the wind whipping off the North Sea was cold enough to freeze your nuts off. Lumberjack's dress code was doing him no favors at all. Eventually, one of the ship's officers came out to calm us down and shut us up. I have a really clear memory of him gently tucking Lumberjack's tiny little blue pecker back into his pants, pulling up his trousers, and dragging him back inside where it was warm.

We weren't at our sparky best by the time we got to De Hoek. Taking the piss out of Lumberjack for having a cock half the size of nothing was about the only thing that brightened our day. The kids who had invited us over—Simon, Leanne, Martin, and Bill—had

never seen us play, but loved what they had heard. They invited us over on the strength of that alone. That group met us with a minibus and drove us to Vlaardingen, a little village about ten miles outside Rotterdam. We were going to do our first European gig in the Sommerstraat youth center; not one of the more established venues on the European circuit, I grant you, but a landmark for G.B.H.

As we had spent all night drinking, we needed a little pick-me-up. Luckily, someone was at hand to help us out. An English lad called Toby appeared out of nowhere, chopped out a massive line of proper Dutch speed as long as your forearm, and invited us to help ourselves.

The result? We didn't get a wink of sleep the whole time we were there. By the time the gig started we were flying. This ordinary little youth club in sleepy Vlaardingen was packed to the gills, rammed with what looked like five or six hundred people. We were going for it, they were going for it, everyone was having the time of their lives. It was a great gig. We really rocked it—I have no idea how the riot started.

All day, everyone had been really lovely. When the show finished, things all went a bit tits up. Suddenly, loads of Dutch punks were running amok in sleepy little Vlaardingen. Shop windows were getting smashed, and people were just taking stuff they wanted. As I stood watching, right in the middle of it all I saw Lumberjack, smashing stuff with the best of them.

The local police turned up, but they didn't have the numbers, so they had to call in the riot police from Rotterdam. By the time they arrived, it was like a scene from armageddon, with added riot shields, tear gas, and dogs.

Like butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, Lumberjack was now chatting with a copper, stroking the guy's dog, shaking his head, and telling him, "This is fucking disgusting, ain't it?"

I thought, *You're one of the main protagonists! You're one of the ones causing this carnage! You're petting his dog, and a lot of this is down to you!* But that was Lumberjack for you. An absolute master

at winding it all up, and then slinking away.

Once things had quieted down, we headed back to the hotel, named Villa Park, the same as Aston Villa's stadium. As a fan of Birmingham City Football Club—the Blues, Aston Villa's arch rivals—I wasn't too happy about this. There's no love lost. And as a Blues fan who was also full of speed, mind you, I let everyone know my displeasure—when I could get a word in edgeways. We were all still raging, and everyone had *lots* to say to just about anyone. Sleep was utterly impossible. The next day dawned, and we were still wired and hadn't slept. We decided to go into Rotterdam for the day before we caught the ferry home.

We spent the day shopping and drinking. We visited a coffee shop, as you do, and bought some hash. Then we found a shop that sold flick-knives, and decided they would be great souvenirs. So we bought some switchblades, then we drank some more.

We stumbled onto the ferry back to Harwich, still full of booze and speed, primed to behave even worse than we did on the way across. To our amazement and delight, we found the boat was full of Scottish schoolgirls! They were sweet sixteen and never been kissed, all on their way back from some field trip or other.

We ended up in cabin 526, and Lumberjack had the great idea to post notes saying DRUGS PARTY! CABIN 526! under the schoolgirls' doors. His plan was just to sit back and wait for them to rush to our cabin to get at a bunch of blokes who hadn't washed or slept for two days. Of course that didn't happen; we ended up smoking our dope on our own in the cabin, and filling the sink with roaches. Some party.

We arrived in Harwich in the morning without so much as a smile off the schoolgirls, and we caught the train to London. As we pulled into Liverpool Street, there were coppers with dogs everywhere, all down the platform. I thought something must be kicking off, that something big was going down.

The train pulled up, we got off, and they all just pounced on us. What the fuck? We hadn't done anything! But the cops took us up to

Liverpool Street police station, split us up, and started to search us. Clearly Lumberjack's drugs party notes and our sink full of roaches were having some repercussions.

I got strip-searched, the full works. Bear in mind, all I'd taken on my trip to Europe was a toothbrush, a tube of toothpaste, and my bass guitar. No clean clothes. I'd been partying for three days straight, I stank of speed and beer, I hadn't washed in any way, and the clothes I was wearing were the same ones I'd had on when I walked out the door in Brum. They were minging!

I stood there butt naked, offering the copper my clothes so he could search through them. He was shaking his head, "No, no, that's fine. Just give them a shake for me, turn the pockets out—yep, that's right. Now the underpants." When all was said and done, he didn't want to go any nearer them than he had to. *Fine, mate, I'll do your job for you. You take it easy.*

I had no drugs, but I did have the switchblade I'd bought in Rotterdam. Mine was actually spring-loaded, for what it matters, which meant the blade shot out of the front rather than the side. It was totally illegal in the UK. So the copper told me he'd have to charge me with possession of an offensive weapon. And yes, I could put my clothes back on now.

Me, Jock, and Colin all had knives, and we all got done for them. Lumberjack and Wilf had a tiny bit of dope, but the copper who was dealing with them just took it from them, threw it in the bin, and let them go. So the irony was that the people with drugs—the reason we got stopped in the first place—were let off and got a coach back to Birmingham. Jock and Colin and myself spent all day in the cells, until they chucked us out and told us we had to be in court the next morning.

We couldn't go home. We were stuck in London with just five pounds between us. Jock—being an archetypal Scotsman—had managed to hang onto that much while the rest of us were spending every penny we had on the party. We had no money left from the gig, we had spent all that on having a good time. We were skint, we

were coming down hard, we were trapped in London, and we had nowhere to stay.

The only option I could think of was a kid I knew in Leytonstone, whose name I thought was John. He might let us stay with him. The only way we could get there was to use Jock's money to catch the Tube. Jock wasn't happy about that at all. He liked it even less when we got to Leytonstone and John wasn't home. We had to use the rest of his money to get the Tube back into London. By then it was late, we hadn't two pennies to scratch our arse with, and we still had nowhere to go. We tried sleeping in Liverpool Street station, but we got kicked out. In the end, we dossed down in the Bank of Nigeria doorway, with our guitars, and tried to get some kip there. Next morning we were making our way to Mansion House, on next to no sleep, with our guitars over our shoulders, and we were surrounded by cops again. They told us they thought the guitars were guns. *For fuck's sake!* Just leave us alone!

Before we even got up in front of the judge, the cops had already told us how things were going to go. They advised us to say we were carrying knives because we were scared of skinheads. They said we had the knives for protection and were carrying them with intent to use them. I knew that wasn't true, and they knew it, too. But the coppers wanted to make it look good for the judge, and there was no point in arguing because that would just make things worse. I was tired and speedy and edgy, and I had never been in trouble with the police before. This was the first time I'd been arrested, and certainly my first time in court. I didn't know what was going to happen. And what would my mom say? What would I tell her and my dad? Would they come and visit me in prison?

In the end, I got a £25 fine for possession of an offensive weapon. So did Colin. Jock was fined £30. Partly because he'd been in trouble before, but mainly—I suspect—because he was Scottish.

So now we all had criminal records, or a longer one, in Jock's case. We had no cash, and we were still stuck in London. Nowadays, in a situation like this, you could sort it out by calling a mate on a

mobile phone, or paying with plastic. Not in 1982, you didn't. The only option we had was to ring people on their landline, and hope they were home and didn't ignore the call. It was a lottery, with our chances of winning drastically reduced by the fact that most of our mates didn't even have a landline we could ring for them to choose to ignore.

After half a lifetime of dialing the handful of numbers we knew, Colin got through to someone. Now we had to wait while they took the cash for our bus fare to their local police station. Then their local station had to be bothered to let the station to which we were nearest know they'd been given the money. Then that station had to scratch around in the petty cash box to give us the exact same amount. Only then could we drag our sorry asses to the bus station to buy our tickets home.

Two days after arriving in Harwich, hallucinating with exhaustion brought on by high-quality Dutch speed and the ensuing lack of sleep, we finally made it back into Birmingham. By then, the rumors doing the rounds were incredible.

"What's this I hear about you in some drugs bust in London, son?"

"Sounds good, but that ain't what happened."

"What are you going to tell your mom?"

"It ain't what happened."

"How much money did you make?"

"We didn't make a penny."

"Spent it all on drugs, more like."

"It ain't what happened."

"Then why did you get busted?"

"It ain't what..."

Our first gig abroad was already in the books. We spent two days full of speed and beer, and we came back without any money. In fact, I was a £25 fine and a criminal conviction down. The situation was prophetic. As far as G.B.H was concerned, that was the next few years in a nutshell.

Lumberjack, who caused all the trouble by writing the notes in the first place, didn't even get nicked. There's a song about it all, "Drugs Party in 526," on our second album. It's pretty self-explanatory.