



IRON TONY IOMMI MAN

My Journey Through HEAVEN & HELL
with BLACK SABBATH

with T. J. LAMMERS



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DA CAPO PRESS

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I dedicate this book to Maria; my wife and soulmate.

My daughter Toni, for being the best daughter
any man could ever have.

My late Mom and Dad, for giving me life.

Introduction:

The Sound of Heavy Metal

It was 1965, I was seventeen years old, and it was my very last day on the job. I'd done all sorts of things since leaving school at fifteen. I worked as a plumber for three or four days. Then I packed that in. I worked as a treadmiller, making rings with a screw that you put around rubber pipes to close them up, but that cut up my hands. I got a job in a music shop, because I was a guitarist and played in local bands, but they accused me of stealing. I didn't do it, but to hell with them: they had me cleaning the storeroom all day anyway. I was working as a welder at a sheet-metal factory when I got my big break: my new band, The Birds & The Bees, were booked for a tour of Europe. I hadn't actually played live with The Birds & The Bees, mind you; I'd just auditioned after my previous band, The Rockin' Chevrolets, had hoofed out their rhythm guitarist and subsequently broken up. The Rockin' Chevrolets had been my first break. We wore matching red lamé suits and played old rock 'n' roll like Chuck Berry and Buddy Holly. We were popular around my hometown of Birmingham, and played regular gigs. I even got my first serious girlfriend out of that band, Margareth Meredith, the sister of the original guitarist.

The Rockin' Chevrolets were fun, but playing in Europe with The Birds & The Bees, that was a real professional turn. So I went home for lunch on Friday, my last day as a welder, and said to my mum: 'I'm not going back. I'm finished with that job.'

But she insisted: 'Iommis don't quit. You want to go back and finish the day off, finish it proper!'

So I did. I went back to work. There was a lady next to me on the line who bent pieces of metal on a machine, then sent the pieces down to me to weld together. That was my job. But the woman didn't come in that day, so they put me on her machine. It was a big guillotine press with a wobbly foot pedal. You'd pull a sheet of metal in and put your foot on the pedal and, bang, a giant industrial press would slam down and bend the metal.

I'd never used the thing before, but things went all right until I lost concentration for a moment, maybe dreaming about being on stage in Europe, and, bang, the press slammed straight down on my right hand. I pulled my hand back as a reflex and the bloody press pulled the ends off my two middle fingers. I looked down and the bones were sticking out. Then I just saw blood going everywhere.

They took me to hospital, sat me down, put my hand in a bag and forgot about me. I thought I'd bleed to death. When someone thoughtfully brought me

fingertips to hospital (in a matchbox) the doctors tried to graft them back on. But it was too late: they'd turned black. So instead they took skin from one of my arms and grafted it on to the tips of my wounded fingers. They fiddled around a bit more to try to ensure the skin graft would take, and that was it: rock 'n' roll history was made.

Or that's what some people say, anyway. They credit the loss of my fingers with the deeper, down-tuned sound of Black Sabbath, which in turn became the template for most of the heavy music created since. I admit, it hurt like hell to play guitar straight on the bones of my severed fingers, and I had to reinvent my style of playing to accommodate the pain. In the process, Black Sabbath started to sound like no band before it - or since, really. But creating heavy metal because of my fingers? Well, that's too bloody much.

After all, there's a lot more to the story than that.

The birth of a Cub

Of course, I wasn't born into heavy metal. As a matter of fact, in my first years preferred ice cream - because at the time my parents lived over my grandfather's ice cream shop: Iommi's Ices. My grandfather and his wife, who I called Papa and Nan, had moved from Italy to England, looking for a better future by opening an ice cream business over here. It was probably a little factory, but to me it was huge, all these big stainless steel barrels in which the ice cream was being churned. It was great. I could just go in and help myself. I've never tasted anything that good since.

I was born on Thursday 19 February 1948 in Heathfield Road Hospital, just outside Birmingham city centre, the only child of Anthony Frank and Sylvie Marie Iommi, née Valenti. My mother had been in hospital for two months with toxæmia before I appeared; was this a sign of things to come she might have felt! Mum was born in Palermo, in Italy, one of three children, to a family of vineyard owners. I never knew my mum's mother. Her father used to come to the house once a week but when you're young you don't hang around sitting there with the old folks, so I never knew him that well.

Papa on the other hand was very good natured and generous and as well as giving money to help the local kids he'd always hand me half a crown when I came to see him. And some ice cream. And salami. And pasta. So you can imagine I loved visiting him. He was also very religious. He went to church all the time and he sent flowers and supplies over there every week.

I think my nan was from Brazil. My father was born here. He had five brothers and two sisters. My parents were Catholic, but I've only seen them go to church once or twice. It's strange that my dad wasn't as religious as his father, but he was probably like me. I hardly ever go to church either. I wouldn't even know what to do there. I actually do believe in a God, but I don't go to church to press the point.

My parents worked in a shop that Papa had given them as a wedding present, in Cardigan Street in Birmingham's Italian quarter. As well as the ice-cream factory Papa owned other shops and he used to have a fleet of mobile baking machines. They'd go into town, set up and sell baked potatoes and chestnuts, whatever was in season. My dad was also a carpenter and a very good one at that; he made all our furniture.

When I was about five or six we moved away from ice-cream heaven to a place in Bennetts Road, in an area called Washwood Heath, which is part of Saltley, which in turn is a part of Birmingham. We had a tiny living room with a staircase

going up to the bedroom. One of my earliest memories is of my mother carrying me down these steep stairs. She slipped and I went flying and, of course, landed on my head. That's probably why I am like I am . . .

I was always playing with my lead soldiers. I had a set of those and little tanks and so on. As a carpenter my dad was away a lot, building Cheltenham Racecourse. Whenever he came back home he'd bring me something, like a model vehicle, adding to the collection.

When I was a kid I was always frightened of things, so I'd get under the blankets and shine a little light. Like a lot of kids do. My daughter was the same. Just like me, she couldn't sleep without the light on, and we'd have to keep her bedroom door open. Like father, like daughter.

One of the reasons I grew a moustache in later years was because of what happened to me in Bennetts Road one day. There was a guy up the road who used to collect great big spiders. I don't mind them now, but I was very much afraid of them then. I was eight or nine at the time. This guy was called Bobby Nuisance, which is the right name for him, and he chased me with one of his spiders once. I was shitting myself and running down this gravel road when I tripped, so all the gravel went into my face and along my lip. The scar is still there now. The kids even started calling me Scarface, so I got a terrible complex about that.

I did have another scar there as well, because not long after the spider thing somebody threw a firework, one of those sparklers, and it went straight up my face. Over the years the scars disappeared, but the one on my lip still stuck out when I was young, so as soon as I could I grew a moustache.

Still living in Bennetts Road I joined the Cubs. It's like the Scouts. The idea was that you'd go on trips, but my parents didn't want me to go away. They were very protective of me. Also these trips cost money and we didn't have that; they earned a pittance in those days. I did wear a Cubs uniform: little shorts and the little thing over the socks, a cap and a tie. So I looked like a younger version of Angus Young.

With scars.

It's the Italian thing

I did get some emotional scars as well. I know Dad didn't want me, I was a accident. I even heard him say this in one of his screaming moods: 'I never wanted you anyway!'

And there was a lot of screaming, because my parents used to fight a lot. He'd lose his temper and Mum'd lose hers, because with him the Italian thing would come out and she was very wild anyway and she'd go potty. They'd grab each other's hair and really seriously fight. When we lived in Bennetts Road I actually saw my mother hit Dad with a bottle and him grabbing her hand trying to defend himself. It was bloody awful, but the next day they'd be talking away like nothing had happened. Really peculiar.

I remember them fighting with the next-door neighbours as well. Mum was in the backyard and there was a wooden fence between us and the neighbour. Apparently one of them said something bad about our family and mother went into a rage. I looked out of my bedroom window and I saw her hanging over the fence hitting the neighbour lady over the head with a broom. And then Dad got involved and so did the woman's husband and it was a fight over the fence until the fence came down. I saw them screaming and shouting and hitting each other and I just stood there, looking out of my first-floor window, crying.

If I did anything wrong I would cop the brunt of it as well. I was frightened to do anything, always afraid of getting beaten up. But that's how it was in those days. It happened with a lot of families, people fighting and getting hit. It probably still is that way. Dad and me didn't get on that well when I was young. I was the kid who was never going to do any good. It was always: 'Oh, you haven't got a job like so-and-so has got. He is going to be an accountant and what are you going to do?'

I was belittled by him all the time, and then Mum joined in as well: 'Yeah, he's got to get a bloody job or he's out!'

It is one of the reasons I wanted to be successful, if only to show them.

Growing up and getting older, there came a point where I would not accept getting clipped around the earhole any more. One time I was on the couch and Dad was hitting me, and I grabbed his hands and stopped him. He went mad almost to the point of crying: 'You don't do that to me!'

That was awful. But he never hit me again.

I must have been nine or ten when I saw my grandfather die. He was at home, very ill, when he went unconscious. He was in bed and my job was to watch him to see if he came round. I'd sit there, mopping his face, and Dad would pop in now and again. But I was alone with him when he got the 'death rattle'. He made the

choking, gurgling sound and then he died. I felt really sad but it was also frightening. I saw the family coming in and out and they all seemed a bit afraid of me as well.

I've seen one or two people die since then. About twenty-five years ago this old lady, very well dressed and very well spoken, lived across the road from me. She went by a nickname, Bud; even her daughter called her that. I went over there once a week to see her and then she'd say: 'Oh, you know, let's have a brandy.'

One day her daughter came rushing over to my house, screaming: 'Quick, come over, come over!'

I went over and found Bud passed out on the floor. I lifted her up a bit, took her in my arms and I shouted: 'Call an ambulance!'

Her daughter ran off, and at that moment Bud died, right there in my arms. It was the same thing: the choking, gurgling sound and . . . bang. As soon as that happened, it brought me immediately back to my grandfather.

I sat there with her until the ambulance showed up. After that I could smell her perfume everywhere and I could never smell that perfume again. For me it had turned into the smell of death.

The shop on Park Lane

When I was about ten we moved to Park Lane in Aston. It was an awful, gang-infested, rough part of Birmingham. My parents bought a sweet shop there, but soon they also sold fruit and vegetables, firewood, canned foods, all sorts of stuff. We'd get people knocking on our door in the middle of the night: 'Can we buy some cigarettes?'

With a shop like that, you basically never closed.

The shop had everything people needed, but it also turned into a meeting place. Some of the neighbours would always be on the step, gossiping away: 'Have you seen so-and-so down the road, ooh, she's wearing a new . . .'

Et cetera. Sometimes they wouldn't even buy anything and stand there for hours, talking. And Mum would be behind the counter, listening.

My mother ran the shop, because Dad worked at the Midlands County Dairy, loading the trucks with milk. He needed to do that to supplement the family income, but I also think he did it because there he was around people he liked. Later on he bought a second shop in Victoria Road, also in Aston, where he started selling fruit and vegetables.

My parents liked Aston, but I didn't. I hated living in the shop because it was damp and cold. It was only a two-bedroom house, with the lounge downstairs, kitchen and then, outside in the backyard, the toilet. You couldn't bring friends there, because our living room doubled as the stockroom: it was filled with beans and peas and all the tinned stuff. That's how we lived. You were surrounded by bloody boxes and shit all the time.

In our neighbourhood we were the first to have a telephone, a great luxury in those days, but where the thing was all depended on whether we'd had a delivery. It was either down here on top of a box, or if we'd had a lot of supplies it would be up there somewhere.

'Where's the phone?'

'Oh, it's up there.'

It was just a very small room. We had a couch and a telly, and behind this it was all beans and tins of fruit and everything.

And the phone.

Somewhere.

I did have my own room until I was forced to share it with Frankie. He was a lodger, but my parents treated him like a son. It was very strange to me when he first came into the house, because they said: 'Well, this is going to be your new . . . brother. Frankie is going to be like a brother to you.'

It was really peculiar. It was like somebody was coming in and taking over because they gave him more attention than me and I resented that. I must have been about eleven at the time and he was about three or four years older. I liked him because he used to buy me stuff, but at the same time I didn't because I had to share my room with him. He lived with us for years and years. And it was my mother who finally got rid of him.

At the time I was maybe seventeen, but I knew more about girls than Frankie did, because he just stayed at home all the time. When he came with me to one of my gigs, I introduced him to this girl. I didn't expect him to get carried away like he did, but he was completely taken over with her. To him, finally meeting somebody was like . . . 'Ahhh!'

Dad wasn't pleased. He said: 'She's the wrong type of woman!'

But Frankie started staying over at her house and then, of course, Dad would really get the needle about him. As I basically stirred it all up by introducing them to each other, I got the blame. Half of me thought, great, we'll be able to get rid of him now, and the other half felt sorry for him.

Eventually he moved in with her. Maybe Dad went a little too far and Frankie left on bad terms. He didn't stay in touch with my family. He went and that was it.

Never seen him since.

The school of hard knocks

I went to the Birchfield Road School, a 'secondary modern school' as it was called. You went there from about the age of ten onwards, until you were fifteen years old, and then you left. The school was about four miles from our house. There was a bus that went there, but it was often full. And it cost a penny, so I saved that by walking.

I met my oldest friend, Albert, at that school. And Ozzy, who was a year behind us. Albert lived close to Birchfield Road. I regularly went over to his place for lunch and of course he came down to my house occasionally. That was about the extent of my social life in those early years, because I didn't go out that much. My parents wouldn't allow it. They were fairly strict and overprotective, and they were convinced I was going to do something wrong if I did go out: 'Don't you go bringing any trouble back here!'

So I was stuck in my room most of the time. And to this day it doesn't bother me to be alone. I like to be with people but it doesn't bother me if I'm not.

My parents did have some cause for concern. Our shop looked out on three or four 'terraced houses' - which means they were all stuck together - across the road, but next to those was a big space full of nothing but rubble. Whether it was a Second World War bomb that had caused that I don't know; it might just have been a house that had been knocked down, but we called it the 'bombed buildings'. It was that area where the gangs congregated. You could be walking down the road and get the shit kicked out of you or even stabbed by these gangs. And if you walked a lot, like I did, you were a prime target. So I started exercising, doing weights and stuff, because I wanted to be able to protect myself. I started going to judo and karate and finally I got into boxing. I did it initially because I didn't want to be picked on, but I really got into it.

At school Albert and me had our own little gang, just the two of us. We had these leather jackets with the words 'The Commanchies' written on the back. That was us: The Commanchies. The school tried to stop us wearing those jackets, but we didn't have any other clothes. Not that I would have wanted to wear it anyway, but my parents simply couldn't afford to buy me a bloody school uniform. All I had was a pair of jeans and that leather jacket.

With me working out and Albert being a big guy as well, we became cocks of the walk at school. Nobody messed with us, because they knew that we'd beat them up. Even the older kids left us alone. That school was totally functioning on violence. People had been stabbed there and I even carried a knife for a bit. It's not that I liked violence; it's just how you lived in those days. At school, if you

didn't get one in first someone would get you. That's why I ended up fighting at the bloody time.

Where we had the shop there was the Aston gang, and they wanted me to join. I was around twelve or thirteen at the time. I went over to their bombed building site a couple of times, but I just didn't associate with the gang in the end. A couple of them nicked things from our shop, so it didn't make sense to hook up with them. I even caught one of these gang members thieving in the shop one day and I ran out to clobber him. He only lived a couple of doors away. He ran into his house and here I was, kicking his front door trying to get in. That's how you handled these people, with violence. Because you couldn't talk to them.

The gang could have turned on me, but it wasn't that bad because I lived in their area. All they were on about anyway was fighting this other gang from another neighbourhood close by. Because of where I lived, this other gang looked on me as belonging to the Aston gang; I wasn't part of it, but on the other hand I was sort of was.

A few years later I had to walk through this other neighbourhood to get to work. I used to pass this one guy who was the leader of this gang. In the morning he'd be normal, but coming back at night, when he had all his mates around him, he'd be a different kettle of fish. The trick was to get through before anybody came out and saw you; it was like the cannonball run. One night I didn't make it and got the beating of a lifetime. You had either to defend yourself or join them, and I didn't want to join them.

I thought my thing would be something to do with boxing; I would probably become a bouncer in a club or something. And I used to get these dreams when I'd be on stage looking out at the crowds. I never quite knew what it was; I always thought it might be fighting, doing some contact sport in front of an audience. Of course, eventually I lived it and saw it and I realised, these are those dreams I was having. But it's playing the guitar!

As I had no interest in school, my grades weren't particularly good. Whenever they called my parents into school, my mother would come home afterwards and scold me: 'Oh, it's disgusting, disgraceful. What have you been up to now?'

I wasn't too bothered about what the teachers and the headmaster thought of me, but I was concerned about how my parents would react. They hated it if you got in trouble. They would worry about what the neighbours would think. People would talk. In the shop it would be: 'Ooh, have you heard what happened to so-and-so down the road? Ooh, the police were around there at their house the other day.'

It was all gossip. Outside their own road they didn't know what was going on, but they would know everything about each other. So if your grades were bad, everybody would know about it.

At school they used to separate Albert and me because we were a nuisance. We'd either be flicking something at somebody or talking or whatever, so we were often ejected from class. You'd have to stand outside the classroom until the lessons finished, and if they sent us both out they'd have me stand in one place and Albert somewhere else. If the headmaster came around and saw you, you

could get caned. Or you had to stay over late, an hour after school, which seemed like an eternity.

The headmaster either caned you on your hand or he made you bend over and he'd cane you on the backside with a stick or a slipper. One of the teachers even used a big compass. Of course kids put books down their trousers, so they'd check you first. It was called 'six of the best', which meant six strokes with this cane. They were nice enough to give you a choice: 'Where do you want it, on your backside or on your hand?'

The teachers who would administer this punishment had to log it in the black book. Every time you got caught again, they'd look in the book: 'You were around here only two days ago!'

I don't remember many of the teachers. Mr Low taught music. I didn't really learn anything from him, because at school the idea of 'music' was playing the recorder. That's all we had, playing those bloody things. And there was Mr Williams, the maths teacher. Funny I should remember him because it was the one lesson I was never in. I hated maths and I used to get bored shitless, so I'd get sent out. Sometimes I wouldn't even do anything, I'd walk in and it was straight away: 'Out!'

Mad, really. But that's what happened and that's the way they did it.

Out of The Shadows, into the limelight

Dad and all his brothers played the accordion, so they were quite a musical family. What I really wanted was a set of drums. I obviously had no room to put them in and certainly wouldn't be able to play them in the house, so it was the accordion or nothing. I started playing it when I was about ten years old. I still have a picture of me as a kid in our backyard, holding my bloody accordion.

We had a gramophone at home, or a 'radiogram', as it was called. It was a unit with a record player on it, and two speakers. And I used to have a little radio. Because I was in my room a lot, it was either listen to that or what do I do? Can I go and sit in the lounge, because we don't have one. I'd listen to the Top 20 on Radio Luxembourg. That's where my love of music originated, sitting in my room and listening to great instrumental guitar bands like The Shadows on my little radio. It made me want to play the guitar as well. I really loved that sound, it was instrumental stuff and I knew: this is what I want to do. So eventually my mother bought me a guitar. She was very good that way. She worked hard and saved up for it. Being left-handed, you were limited to what you could get, certainly in those days: 'A left-handed guitar, what's that?'

There was this electric Watkins Rapier that I saw in a catalogue. It cost something like £20, and Mum paid it off in weekly instalments. My left-handed Watkins had two pick-ups and a couple of little chrome selector switches that you'd push, and it came with a little Watkins Westminster amp. I stole one of the speakers from our radiogram and put it in that amp, which didn't go down very well. But it hardly mattered, because my parents didn't play music that much anyway.

So there I was, with my first little kit, playing away in my room. I'd listen to the Top 20 and wait for The Shadows to come on to tape them with a microphone on this old reel to reel, so I could try and learn their songs. Later I'd get the album and learn the songs from playing that over and over. I've always liked going back to The Shadows, as I like melodies and tunes. And I've always tried to make my guitar-playing melodic, as music is all about melody. Me trying to do that comes from those very early days. That stayed with me; it has always been a part of my songwriting.

I liked The Beatles, but The Shadows and Cliff Richard were more based on the rock 'n' roll stuff than The Beatles, so they were more my thing. Of course I like Elvis as well, but not as much as Cliff and The Shadows. They were it for me. Cliff was bigger in England than Elvis was, and that might have had something to do with it. I've met Cliff a few times, but I never said to him: 'Oh, I was a big fan of

yours.'

After school I'd sit upstairs and play my guitar for a couple of hours. I really took to the guitar and practised as much as I could, but bands weren't immediately knocking on the door asking me to join. That's why my first venture was with Albert. He was going to be the singer and I would take care of the music. He couldn't sing, but he thought he could. His house was rather posh: it had two living rooms. We'd be in the front room with me and my amp playing away and him singing, and you'd always hear his dad shouting from the other room: 'Shut that bloody row up! Can't you go somewhere else?'

We only knew one song, which we played over and over: 'Jezebel' by Frankie Laine. We must have been twelve or thirteen years old then, and Albert used to wail: 'If ever the devil was born, without a pair of horns, it was you, Jezebel, it was you.'

So that's really what started it all.

After that I hooked up with this piano player and his drummer. They were a lot older than me and they asked me if I'd play with them in this pub. I couldn't really play very well, but they thought I was great. I only did that a couple of times. I was incredibly nervous sitting in with these guys, but it was just something I would do then.

'Blimey, a gig! In a pub!'

I wasn't even old enough to be in a pub, but those were the first gigs I ever did.

Ron and Joan Woodward lived a couple of doors away from our shop. Ron visited us a lot. Him and Dad would be chatting and smoking away just about every night. He spent more time at our house than at his, and he became like another adopted son. He was probably ten or fifteen years older than me, but somehow I became friends with him. I talked him into buying a bass guitar. He started to learn to play it and we actually did a couple of little gigs. And everybody was going: 'Well, he's a bit old, isn't he?'

I'd just say: 'He's my mate and he wants to be in the band.'

That's how it was then; your mate would be in your band.

'Can he play?'

'Oh no, he can't play but he's my mate!'

We had a rhythm guitarist and a drummer playing with us. We rehearsed about three times a week at this youth club. It was great. From piddling around by yourself in your room to playing music with other people was a fantastic experience. Nigel, the rhythm guitarist, was a bit cocky. One day he was singing and the mic suddenly stuck to him, because it wasn't earthed. He went rolling around on the floor and got a bad electric shock. Because nobody liked him, we all thought, it serves you right. But in the end we did unplug him, so he survived. As a matter of fact, he was right as rain afterwards, better than ever in fact. It was like it had done him good. But he didn't last that long, and neither did that band.

I couldn't wait to leave school. I didn't like it, and I don't think it liked me very much either. Everybody left school at fifteen, unless you stayed on and went to college. Fifteen and that was it, you were out. And so was I. It was a great relief. I started looking for a job and I applied myself to playing the guitar even more.

Because I practised all the time, I was getting much better than people like Roy Woodward, so I joined this other band which I thought was very good, The Rockin' Chevrolets. It must have been around 1964 so I was sixteen or so. To my mind they were really professional. They could play all The Shadows' songs perfectly and, because a couple of the guys were older than me, they also did a lot of rock 'n' roll. I'd never been a big fan of Chuck Berry, Gene Vincent or Buddy Holly, but I now got into that music as well.

The singer, Neil Morris, was the oldest guy in the band. There was a chap on bass called Dave Whaddley, the drummer was called Pat Pegg and the rhythm guitar player was Alan Meredith. That's when I met Alan's sister, Margareth. We were engaged to be married, actually. Our relationship would last a lot longer than The Chevrolets did.

I don't remember how I got into this band. I probably saw an advert in a music shop window. That was your life; you'd hang around a music shop or you'd go to see another band playing and you'd meet people through that.

My parents were wary of me playing with this band in pubs. I even had to be home at a certain time, but after a little while they were okay with it, also because I brought some money in. The Rockin' Chevrolets made things easier for me as well by meeting Mum first. They came down and she made them baccarat sandwiches. As she did in later years with Black Sabbath, the same thing: she always ask them if they wanted something to eat. Always. That's the sort of mother she was.

The Rockin' Chevrolets started getting a lot of work. We all had the same red lamé suits, so we wore those at every gig. I didn't really have any money to spend on a suit, but you had to look the part. At the weekend we played in pubs. One pub was in a bad part of Birmingham and every bloody time we played there'd be a fight. We provided the soundtrack to their fighting. We also played the odd wedding, or we'd end up in a bloody social club playing to people twice our age who would go: 'Ooh, you're too loud!'

Because things were getting more serious, I wanted a better guitar. Burns was one of the few companies that made left-handed guitars, so I bought me one of those, a Burns Trisonic. It had a control on it with the 'trisonic sound', whatever that was. I only played it until I eventually found a left-handed Fender Stratocaster. And I had a Selmer amp, with an echo in it.

The Rockin' Chevrolets broke up because they kicked out Alan Meredith. My next big band was going to be The Birds & The Bees. I auditioned for them and got the job. They were professional, worked a lot and were even due to go to Europe. I decided to really go for it, quit my job and become a professional musician. I was working as a welder in a factory at the time. I went to work on the Friday morning, my last day at the job, and at lunchtime I told Mum I wasn't going back for the afternoon shift. But she told me I had to, and to finish the job properly.

So I did. I went back to work.

And then my whole world fell apart.

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