



ISSUE 2 - August 2026



From a St. Louis Billboard to the Heart of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal

By Wade "Metal Child" Brooks • CONTINUED FROM ISSUE 1



The British Caledonian billboard near my St. Louis home. London nonstop: \$225.

LONDON NONSTOP — \$225

For probably a year, a British Caledonian billboard stood near where I lived in St. Louis. It advertised a nonstop flight to London for \$225. Every time I passed that sign, England seemed a little more within reach.

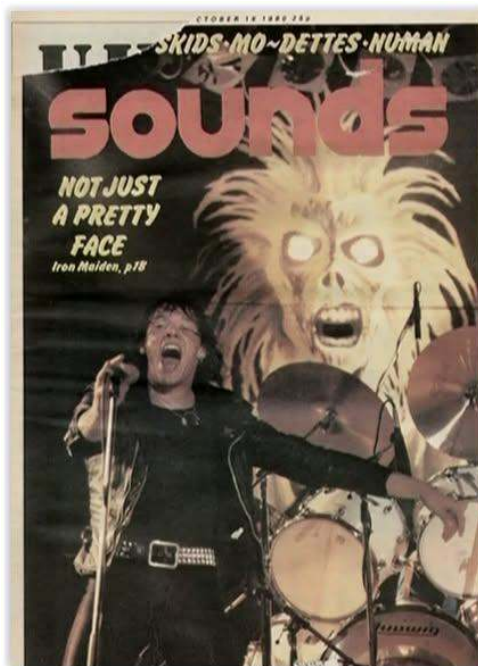
For most people, London meant landmarks, museums and sightseeing. To me, England was the home of the greatest heavy metal music in the world. Black Sabbath, Judas Priest and Motörhead had come from Britain, and a new generation—including Iron Maiden, Saxon, Angel Witch, Tygers of Pan Tang and Raven—was taking shape.

The American heavy metal scene could not compare with what was happening there. I did not want to read about it months later in a magazine. I wanted to go to England and experience it firsthand.

The billboard gave me the motivation. The dream became a plan.

THE LETTER THAT OPENED THE DOOR

In 1980, when I was 19, I wrote to Sounds, one of Britain's major weekly music newspapers. I asked for British headbangers—male or female—who could become pen pals and tell me about the London heavy metal scene. I said I planned to be in England sometime in 1981. The published letter said “probably May,” but I had not yet settled on a month.



The Sounds issue featuring Paul Di'Anno | My "Write On" letter in Sounds

I listed Judas Priest, Saxon, Motörhead, Tygers of Pan Tang, Yesterday and Today, Iron Maiden, AC/DC, Scorpions and the Michael Schenker Group. I ended bluntly: “You can see how desperate I am to come to England for the U.S. metal scene stinks.”

A FLOOR COVERED IN AIRMAIL



A mail slot like the one in the front door of my father's townhouse—the doorway where the British heavy metal world first came pouring into my life.

One day I came home from work with my dad and opened the door to his townhouse. Light-blue airmail envelopes were scattered across the floor beneath the mail slot. I had no idea my Sounds letter would receive that kind of response. The British fans were great letter writers. Inside those envelopes were John, Esther, Bernard and many others—people who would soon become part of this journey rather than names on paper.

More replies kept trickling in over time. Keeping up with so many individual conversations became a project of its own, so I created my own newsletter to share news and maintain the correspondence. Every new envelope strengthened the network that would carry me through England and into Switzerland.



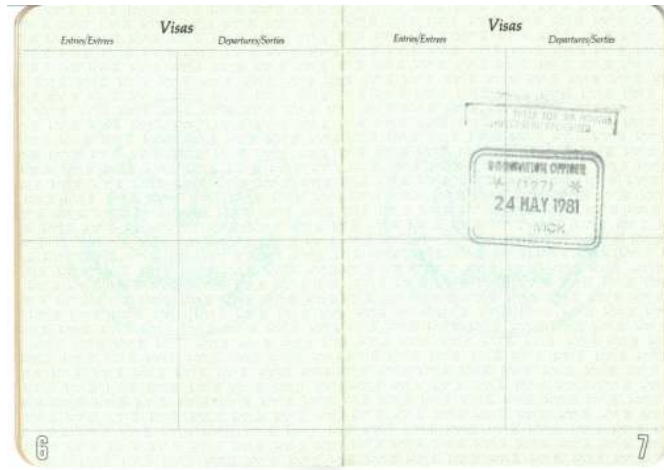
I kept every letter, bundled the correspondence with rubber bands and spread the pen-pal replies across my bed. Every envelope was a doorway into the scene.

Before email, social media or Facebook, every connection began with paper, postage and patience. The Sounds letter did more than supply travel tips. It gave me a human network before I ever set foot in England.

BOOKED BEFORE THE DISCOUNT DISAPPEARED

Because the \$225 fare was not going to last, I booked the British Caledonian flight before the discount went away. Then the Motörhead concert in St. Louis was announced for May 22, 1981. I had already booked my trip, but there was no way I was leaving before that show. I changed my departure to the following day.

On May 22, I saw Lemmy, “Fast” Eddie Clarke and Phil “Philthy Animal” Taylor in St. Louis. On May 23, still carrying the charge of that concert, I boarded my flight for London. The Gatwick stamp in my passport is dated May 24, 1981.



My 1981 passport photograph | Gatwick entry stamp: May 24, 1981

I had bought a British Rail pass in advance—about \$200, if memory serves. That pass became the backbone of the trip. I took the train from the airport to a stop near Bernard Doe’s home in Stevenage, where I stayed for the first few nights.



Me in my bedroom at my dad’s Genesta Walk townhouse. | The teenage Metal Child’s world—heavy metal posters, photographs, records and music on every wall.

BERNARD DOE — MY MAIN CONTACT



*Bernard Doe, at right, photographed later behind Shades Records with members of Mercyful Fate.
Photo by my good friend Ken "Scorch" Dallas.*

Of everyone who answered my Sounds letter, Bernard Doe became my main contact in England. His reply came from 17 Livingstone Link, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 0EP, Great Britain. More than 45 years later, that remains his publicly listed Metal Forces Magazine contact address.

Bernard did not merely describe the British heavy metal scene. He took me directly into it: record shopping in Soho, the Lyceum concert, and the people and places I had crossed the Atlantic to experience. When Bernard and I drank at a pub, he ordered bitter. That was new to me. I was from St. Louis, where I drank Budweiser and Busch beer. This was no organized tour. My rail pass, the people who answered my letter and my love of heavy metal determined the route.

A HEAVY METAL LOAD — LITERALLY

The day after I arrived, Bernard took me into Soho. British heavy metal albums and 7-inch singles that were difficult or impossible to find in St. Louis were suddenly right in front of me. I went crazy buying records—and immediately created a problem for myself.

For the next two and a half weeks, I had to lug that heavy load on and off trains everywhere I went. Albums are not light. Add a stack of singles, luggage and everything else I bought, and my heavy metal pilgrimage became heavy in the most literal sense. Yikes.



Judas Priest's Killing Machine artwork echoed the large paintings displayed inside the leather shop.

We also visited an S&M leather and studs shop where Rob Halford got gear for his Judas Priest stage outfits. Several large paintings showed the leather-clad figure from the Killing Machine cover, but without the Judas Priest name or album title. They looked like versions of the original artwork.

I bought studded wristbands, belts and bullet belts. That meant even more weight to carry. The gear would later create a nervous moment when customs opened my luggage in Basel.

THE LONDON THAT STAYED WITH ME

I stayed one night with a male pen pal whose name I no longer remember. Near his house sat a badly rusted old car. I remember walking back from the Underground stop, seeing that car in front of a house and being struck by it. I came from the suburbs of St. Louis. Even in South St. Louis I had not seen something quite like that.

I wanted to take a bath, and his mother had to turn on some kind of heating coil so I could get a quick one. That small domestic detail stayed with me because it was so different from home. Travel is often remembered through concerts and landmarks, but sometimes it is an old car, a heating coil and the inside of someone's family home that make another country feel real.

The young man also warned me about skinheads. I was wearing a denim jacket covered with heavy metal patches over my black leather motorcycle jacket. To me, that was simply how a headbanger dressed. To him, it could make me noticeable to the wrong people.

A TRAIN CONVERSATION ABOUT REAGAN

On another train, a man made small talk with me and brought up Ronald Reagan. I remember thinking: I am 19 years old, traveling through England for heavy metal—not American politics. I had crossed an ocean to talk about bands, records and concerts, yet there I was being treated as a representative of the United States.

NO TOURIST VACATION

Piccadilly Circus was my only real sightseeing stop. Otherwise, I was on the Underground or a train, walking to someone's home, visiting record and leather shops, meeting pen pals or going to concerts. The entire trip was heavy metal.

THE WILD RIDE TO THE SOUNDHOUSE

One English pen pal invited me to stay with her at her parents' home. I cannot remember her name after more than 45 years, but I remember being welcomed properly: I had my own bedroom and my own bed for the night.

She and a male friend took me to see Neal Kay at the famous Bandwagon Heavy Metal Soundhouse. The friend drove a tiny car at what felt like an insane speed through the back roads. Then came the roundabouts. We did not have roundabouts where I lived in 1981, and he attacked them as if the car were on rails. The ride there and back remains almost as vivid as meeting Neal Kay. He drove like a maniac.



Great video on youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqvge0m_B70

DELIVERING U.S. METAL TO NEAL KAY



Neal Kay | Bandwagon Heavy Metal Soundhouse

I met Mike Varney because of the Shrapnel Records letter he published in *Guitar Player*. In it, he announced that his new label was searching the United States for ten outstanding heavy metal guitarists for a forthcoming release called *U.S. Metal: Unsung Guitar Heroes*. I saw that letter, wrote to Mike at the address he provided and began the relationship that led to this moment.

I carried a cassette Mike had given me containing music intended for the upcoming *U.S. Metal* release. I placed it directly into the hands of one of Britain's most influential heavy metal DJs. The important point is that a 19-year-old fan from St. Louis carried emerging American heavy metal into the Soundhouse. My full story about meeting Mike Varney through *Guitar Player* will appear in a future issue.



LETTERS

Send To: Guitar Player
20605 Lazaneo, Cupertino, CA 95014

I wrote to let you know how much I enjoyed your article on me in the April '80 issue. People fill a need in the music world that no one else reaches. You serve the entire community of guitarists, both esoteric players up, and that helps us all.

Peter W. Lang
Minneapolis, MN

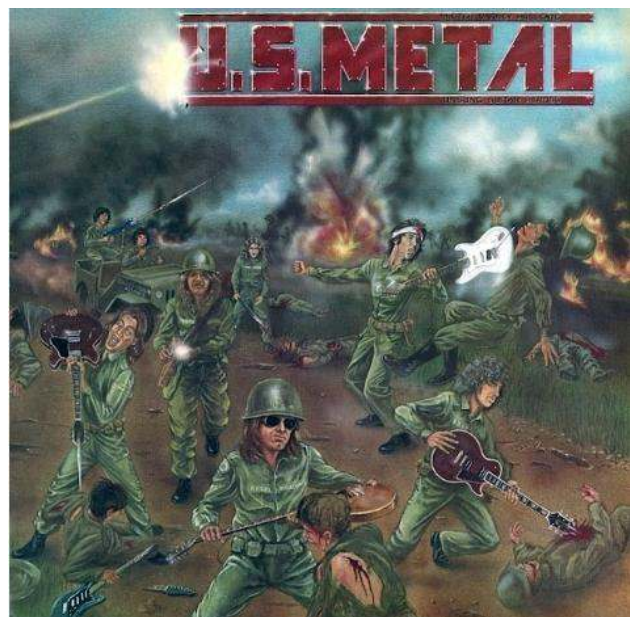
I received the June '80 issue and want to express my thanks for having you share some thoughts with your readers in *Guitar Magazine* and its readers. It never ceases to amaze me that no matter how big you get, you never forget. The current favorite established artists are always grateful, and I think that's great because then we guitarists can look at each other and the people we meet at a look at all of us. Annie Bertie brought up a big mention for doing such a wonderful job writing out all we talked about when we first met, talk in, and the really draws. Once again the usual fill is to cover me by from the cover to the center page. It does a custom job. It always takes a lot of time, I would imagine. Great attention on page 44 that the G acoustic series amps soundly revolves over the G series. Wonderful piece.

I not forthcoming to any responders. Thanks for patience. As always, I remain

Leslie West
Leslie West's Guitar
New York, NY

Shrapnel Records is a new label dedicated to the art of heavy metal rock and roll. We are presently scouring the States for the ten hottest metal guitarists to appear on our forthcoming release *U.S. Metal: Unsung Guitar Heroes*. The guitarists must annihilate a la Van Halen, Ulrich Roth, Michael Schenker, etc. We want the best from the U.S. We know there are many incredible guitarists who never achieve national recognition. This project will not tie the band up to a long-term contract, but it will be a good vehicle to major label interests. If you know of any guitarists who fit this description, please have them send a non-returnable cassette to me by November 1, 1980.

Mike Varney
Shrapnel Records
Box 1176
Novato, CA 94947



Mike Varney's Shrapnel Records letter in *Guitar Player* Magazine October 1980r—

the letter I answered and how I met Mike | *U.S. Metal: the project that connected emerging American players with the British audience Neal Kay helped build*

MAY 31, 1981 — THE LYCEUM, LONDON



Angel Witch, Vardis, White Spirit and Raven at the Lyceum, London, May 31, 1981.

Bernard took me to exactly the kind of concert I had crossed the Atlantic to see: Angel Witch, Vardis, White Spirit and Raven on one bill. It placed me in the middle of the New Wave of British Heavy Metal while it was still unfolding—not as history, but as a living scene.



Angel Witch—one of the bands at the center of the movement I had come to experience firsthand.

MOTORCYCLE IRENE OPENS THE BACKSTAGE DOOR

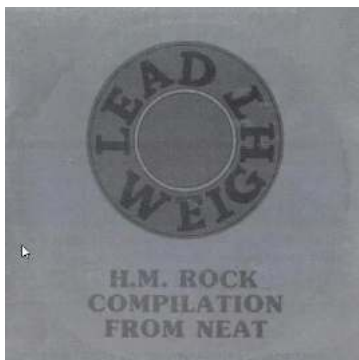


Motorcycle Irene with Lemmy in a photograph published by Sounds. Irene was often photographed with Lemmy when he was in London.

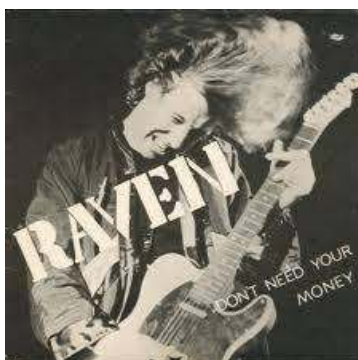
At the Lyceum I recognized Motorcycle Irene from Sounds and introduced myself. She was famous within the world the paper documented. Irene took me backstage to Vardis' small dressing room. It was not some giant rock-star suite, but to a 19-year-old American headbanger it was another door opening into the British scene.

This was what the original “Write On” letter had made possible. The replies led to Bernard; Bernard led to the concert; and one introduction inside the venue led backstage. I was no longer reading about the scene months later in an American magazine. I had stepped directly into it.

RAVEN — A CONNECTION THAT LASTED 45 YEARS



Lead Weight — the Neat Records compilation that first introduced me to Raven



Raven's debut, Rock Until You Drop



I was already a huge Raven fan when Bernard took me to the Lyceum. I first heard them on the famous New Wave of British Heavy Metal compilation Lead Weight from Neat Records. From there I followed the singles and then the debut album, Rock Until You Drop. It remains one of my ten favorite albums to this day. Wacko went crazy kicking his drums off the riser.

Seeing Raven at the Lyceum was not an introduction to an unknown opening band. It was the chance to finally see a band I already loved, in England, while the music was happening. I could not have known that I would still be attending their concerts more than four decades later, staying in touch with John Gallagher and reconnecting every time Raven returned to St. Louis.

“THE BEST LOAD-IN MUSIC EVER”

When Raven played St. Louis in the spring of 2026, they played “Inquisitor,” the original Raven song included on Lead Weight—the track my buddy Ken “Scorch” Dallas and I loved when we first heard it. Later, I parked behind their trailer at the side entrance and left my bright headlights on so they could see while loading equipment. I played Judas Priest’s Sad Wings of Destiny as John and his brother Mark loaded the trailer. Both began singing along to one of their favorite albums.



Mark Gallagher, Wade Brooks and John Gallagher behind Raven's gear trailer after the load-in, lit by my headlights and a streetlight in St. Louis. John & Mark move around so much it's hard to get a shot.

After closing the back of the trailer, Mark told me, “That has to be the best load-in music ever.” Bernard had taken me to see Raven in London in 1981. Forty-five years later, I was still there—watching Raven play and sharing one of heavy metal’s greatest albums with John and Mark Gallagher.

A concert connection made in 1981 was still alive 45 years later.

JOHN, A HOME-COOKED MEAL AND WHITESNAKE

Another pen pal, John, took me to see Whitesnake. I hit it off with him, and I hope somehow he reads this one day. His mother had a really nice home with a garden in the back. She fed me a memorable meal—fresh vegetables and a beef-type stew. After living from one train and one stranger’s house to the next, being welcomed and fed like that meant something. Most days, my go-to meal was fish and chips wrapped in newspaper. I ate at a McDonald’s in London once, and it was horrible—nothing like the McDonald’s back home.

A TRIP TO THE CHEMIST

Of all the times to get sick, I developed a sore throat during this trip. John took me to a chemist—what we would call a pharmacy in the United States—to get something for it. The man gave me a bottle of medicine, but it was not sweetened like the cold syrups I knew back home. This was hard-core medicine, and the taste hit me immediately. No wonder the song said, “A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down.” In America we sweeten our cold syrups. That British bottle made no such concession.

John drove a very small compact car. Sitting behind him in the back seat while he drove on the right side felt completely wrong to me. Something was wrong with the gearshift, so his girlfriend shifted the car from the passenger seat while John drove. His girlfriend brought along her friend Lucy.

I wore my heavy black leather motorcycle jacket. The Whitesnake show was packed, general admission and standing-room. We were near the back, crushed in with sweaty heavy metal fans and no ventilation. It became so brutally hot that I took off the jacket and held it through the show. Removing it helped, but then I had to protect and carry that heavy leather jacket while the crowd pressed against me from every direction.

YELLOW LIGHTS AFTER THE SHOW

Afterward, I remember driving along the roadway beneath London’s yellow streetlights. The color and atmosphere looked like something from an Iron Maiden record cover. Those lights, the tiny car, the girlfriend shifting from the passenger seat, the crowd and the heavy jacket all fused into one memory.

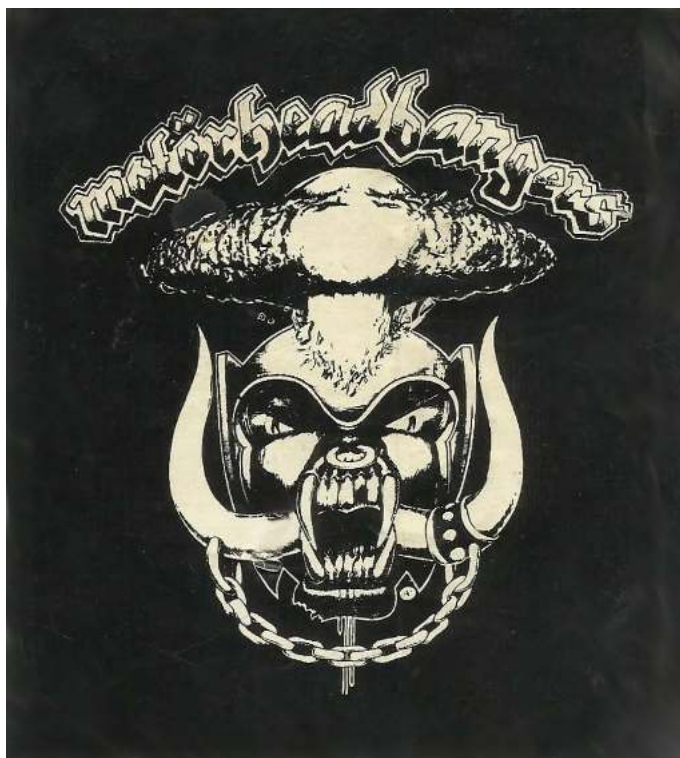
The concert mattered, but so did John’s mother’s garden and meal. That is why this story cannot be reduced to a list of bands and dates. The homes, families, roads and odd little cars were part of the heavy metal pilgrimage too.

THE PEN-PAL RAILWAY REACHES BLACKPOOL

My British Rail pass and the people who answered my Sounds letter carried me around the country. I eventually traveled north to Blackpool to meet a female pen pal. I cannot remember her name now, but she was definitely older than me and was the reason I first arrived there.

At some point we wound up by the ocean, perhaps inside a bar with a wide bay of windows looking out over the water. The day was heavily overcast. The waves looked powerful and the water was dark and murky. My only comparison was Pensacola, Florida, with its white beaches and bright Gulf water. Blackpool looked nothing like that. The gray sky and churning ocean gave the place a completely different mood, and the image has stayed with me.

Helen Taylor and her roommate came to Blackpool to pick me up. I remember Helen seeming a little annoyed about the older pen-pal gal. Looking back more than four decades later, I suspect the communication between them may have been mixed. I did not fully understand it then, and I do not want to invent details now. What I remember is the uneasy feeling—and then leaving Blackpool with Helen for the experience that would change my place in the Motörhead world.



My buddy Ken "Scorch" Dallas's official 1981 Motorheadbangers membership certificate—an example of the fan-club membership that connected us directly to Helen Taylor and Motörhead.

Before I left St. Louis, I was already a member of Motorheadbangers, and I had written to Helen to tell her I was planning the trip to England. That connection was already in place before she picked me up in Blackpool; meeting Helen was not a chance encounter.

Helen was Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor's sister and one of the people behind the official Motorheadbangers fan club. What happened after she picked me up became one of the defining moments of my life in heavy metal.

THE NIGHT THAT PUT ME ON THE MAP



📷 Motorhead drummer Phil Taylor visits his former home at Elder Square, Ashington, with parents Colin and Margaret, March 24, 1982 (Image: Newcastle Chronicle)

Phil “Philthy Animal” Taylor with his parents, Colin and Margaret Taylor, outside the family’s former Ashington home, March 24, 1982. Photograph: Newcastle Chronicle.

Helen and her roommate took me to the home of Colin and Margaret Taylor—Phil’s parents. Picture me in 1981: a 19-year-old heavy metal fan from St. Louis, not yet 20, sitting in front of the television in Mr. and Mrs. Taylor’s living room. Only days earlier I had watched Motörhead perform in St. Louis. Now I was in England with Phil’s parents, Helen and her roommate, watching Motörhead home movies that Mr. Taylor had recorded.

This was not footage I could find in a record store or watch at a theater. These were Mr. Taylor’s own recordings, being played for me inside Phil Taylor’s family home. I had crossed the Atlantic hoping to get closer to the British heavy metal scene, but I could never have planned an evening this personal.

After that unforgettable night, I stayed at Helen’s flat. The following day she took me to her father’s photography studio. Inside was the small office where Helen ran Motorheadbangers.

MOTORHEADBANGERS

Fanzines by Helen Taylor and Paul Hadwen



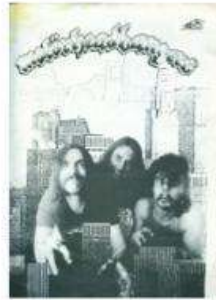
Motorheadbangers 1
12 pages
Feb. 1980 **SOLD**



Motorheadbangers 2
16 pages
Sep. 1980 **SOLD**



Motorheadbangers 3
16 pages
Feb. 1981 **SOLD**



Motorheadbangers 4
16 pages
May 1981 **SOLD**



Motorheadbangers 5
16 pages
Nov. 1981 **SOLD**

Motorheadbangers fanzine covers produced by Helen Taylor and Paul Hadwen from February 1980 through November 1981.

“WOULD YOU HELP US IN NORTH AMERICA?”

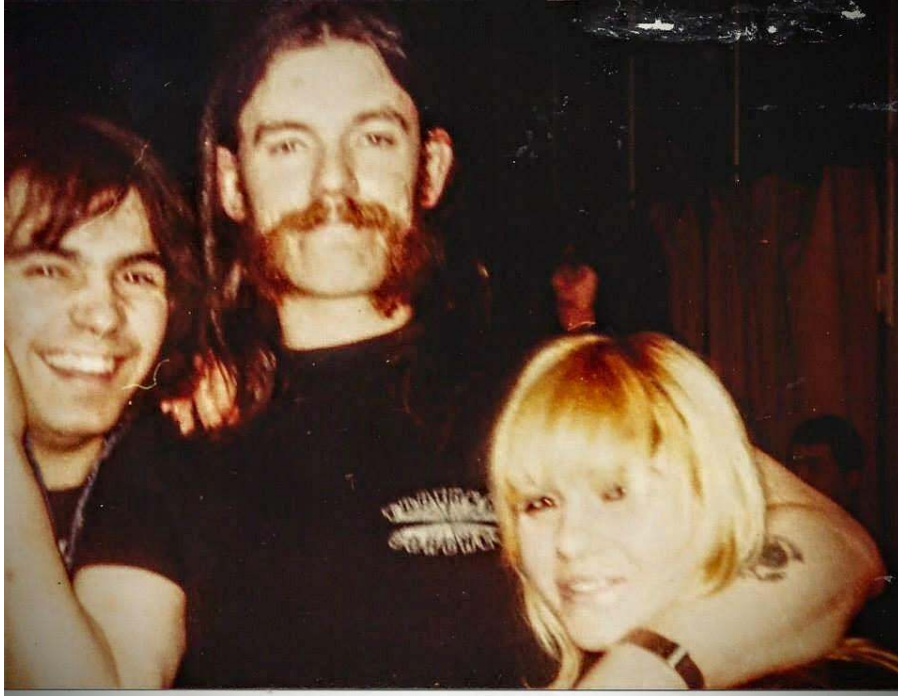
In that little office, Mr. Taylor asked me if I would help them with memberships for Motorheadbangers in North America. I had arrived as a young American fan carrying letters, records and a rail pass. Now Phil Taylor's father was asking me to join the team and represent Motörhead's official fan club across the United States and Canada.

I was walking on cloud nine. The night before, I had been welcomed into the Taylor family home and sat with Phil's parents watching their Motörhead videos. The next day, I was being entrusted with North American Motorheadbangers.

That invitation changed my standing completely. I was no longer only a fan looking for the British scene. I had an official role, a direct connection to Motörhead and a responsibility to build the Motorheadbangers network across North America. It gave fans a reason to know the name “Metal Child.”

BASEL, SWITZERLAND — LIKE A POSTCARD

Later in the trip I traveled to Basel to visit my pen pal Esther Kessler. Through Esther I met and befriended her brother Lawrence, lead singer of the Basel heavy metal band Sorcerer. Lawrence later moved to St. Louis and was the songwriter and vocalist for the band Hell Patrol (name from Raven song)



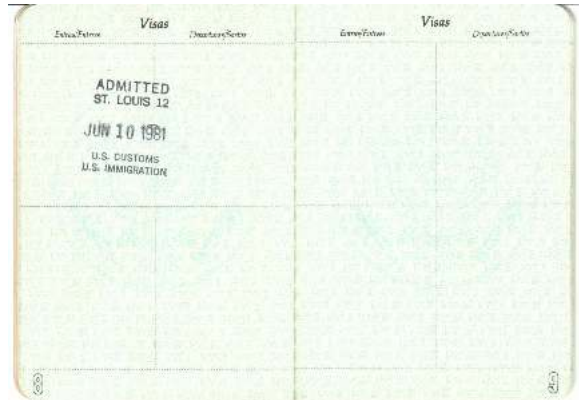
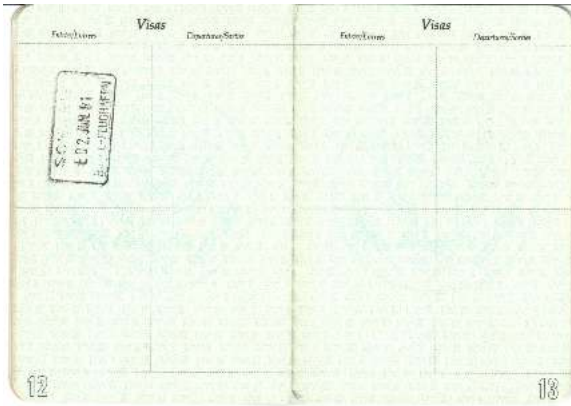
Lawrence Kessler at left, Lemmy in the center and Esther Kessler at right.

SORCERER REHEARSAL

Lawrence took me to a Sorcerer rehearsal. That gave me another kind of access—not a major London concert, but a working European heavy metal band in its own rehearsal room. “Night Stalker,” which appeared on Sorcerer’s demo, became my favorite song. “I Am the Underworld” was another great Sorcerer song.

After rehearsal, Lawrence took me for a beer with Sorcerer guitarist Ralph. We sat outside on the sidewalk drinking tall draft beers. I kept the glass as a souvenir—another dumb idea when I was already carrying records, leather, studs, bullet belts and luggage around Europe. But at 19, it seemed like something I had to bring home.

Basel was quaint, clean and colorful. Modern shops occupied older buildings, and the Alps rose in the background. Sitting outside with Lawrence and Ralph after rehearsal, beer in front of us and the mountains beyond the town, felt like being inside a postcard.



Basel stamp: June 2, 1981 | Return to St. Louis: June 10, 1981

CUSTOMS OPENS THE HEAVY METAL LUGGAGE

I did not speak a word of German. A Basel customs officer opened my luggage and found the studded wristbands, belts and bullet belts I had bought in Soho. I became nervous because I could not explain any of it.

Fortunately, a man who had come with Esther spoke to the officer in German and explained the situation. Whatever he said worked. I was allowed through with my unusual heavy metal cargo intact—including the records, leather gear and that tall beer glass.

I returned to England through Heathrow on June 6 and arrived home in St. Louis on June 10. The stamps in my original passport preserve the route.

FROM AIRMAIL TO FACEBOOK



The New Wave of British Heavy Metal was not history to me in 1981. I traveled to England while it was happening.

The billboard gave me the idea. The Sounds letter gave me a way into the scene. Bernard Doe became my main contact in England. Neal Kay received Mike Varney's American metal cassette. Raven became a connection that still continues. Helen Taylor and her parents connected me directly to Motörhead. Esther connected me to Switzerland and to Lawrence, Sorcerer and a friendship that later reached St. Louis.



MOTORHEADBANGERS. The Official Motorhead Fan Club. Send Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for Details to: 5563 Genesta Walk; St. Louis, MO 63123

MOTORHEADBANGERS. The Official Motorhead Fan Club. Send Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope for Details to: PO Box 28088, St. Louis, MO 63119

The Motorheadbangers St. Louis mailing address I used while working as the North American fan-club coordinator for Helen Taylor. Classified ads in Circus Sept & Nov 1981. I got a P.O. Box

None of these relationships began online. They began with handwritten letters, international postage, trust and the willingness to travel. Decades later, Facebook became the hub that allowed many of us—including Bernard, Helen and Esther—to reconnect and remain in contact.

What began with a \$225 billboard became a network of friendships and experiences that lasted for the rest of my life. This trip was not simply a vacation or a collection of concerts. It was pivotal to Metal Child and to who I became.

HEAR BOTH SIDES ON THE MOTÖRCAST

For more detail in our own voices, listen to both my interview and Helen Taylor's interview with host Howard H. Smith on The Motörcast, the official Motörhead podcast. On Spotify, open The Motörcast and search its episodes for Wade Brooks and for "Philthy's Sister — Helen Taylor."

Spotify: open.spotify.com/show/3nNDAVqkgJTBjCkuj2xHSX



The official Motörhead announcement for Helen Taylor's Motörcast interview, pictured with her brother Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor.

TO BE CONTINUED

This is my history, and the story will continue as more names, photographs and memories return

A NOTE TO READERS

This is a fanzine. I do not charge for it. It is available at www.metalchild.com to read online or download. If you have a pdf, I encourage you to forward copies by email to old heavy metal friends. Get your own memories going with old mates. Some photographs used in this issue originally appeared in Sounds. The memories, facts, photographs and corrections are mine; I supplied the story in segments, and ChatGPT helped organize them and recommend how to weave them into a readable narrative. I had a reality check in April with a heart attack. 99% blockage on one artery needed 3 stints 4 in all. I am retired, our daughter and grandkids live with us. Retirement has given me the time. Memories pour back. It is pretty easy to upload photos to ChatGPT and start telling the stories around them. Many hours of editing but it's a blast. Sincerely, Wade 'Metal Child' Brooks, my grandkids call me Opa.

CONTACT

Wade "Metal Child" Brooks

Email wadealanbrooks@gmail.com

Web www.metalchild.com

St. Charles, Missouri, USA • Call or text 314-690-8320

If you need to mail me, contact me and I will give you my current address.



Metal Child Old School Heavy Metal Fan

@MetalChildOfficial

Past: Motorheadbangers North America with Helen Taylor, Iron Maiden Fan Club - replied ...more

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5.8K followers • 30 following

Past: Motorheadbangers North America with Helen Taylor, Iron Maiden Fan Club - replied to fan letters for Rod Smallwood, Promotion for Trouble & Exciter.

Media/news company

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MERCHANDISE

COMING SOON

T-shirts, hats, buttons, stickers and patches at
low affordable prices



Future issues: Bon Scott and AC/DC, NWOBHM, Iron Maiden, Saxon, Trouble, Exciter, Jaguar, Mike Varney, Raven, Bernard Doe and more.

