

Operation: Black Rose

***A true story from [The Rocklore Files](#)
Of [Jamie Thompson](#)**

Published by Jamie & Judy Thompson

Copyright 2003

On the evening of Saturday March 5th, 1977 I drove my copper colored 1968 Dodge Dart down Rt. 413 South, through Bristol, PA and crossed the rickety Burlington Bristol Bridge . My girlfriend, Joyce, was riding in the passenger seat. It had been quite a day for us. We spent the afternoon running around in Washington Crossing Park enjoying a lovely early spring day in the woods. We ate dinner at my house and now we were on our way to a gig with my band “Black Rose” at the Village Tavern in Roebling, NJ. I did my usual teen-age aggressive driving stunts down Rt. 130 North, weaving in and out of traffic and passing cars like they were standing still. Then we turned off the highway into the quiet little town of Roebling. Quiet, at least, until my bandmates and I started gigging at a sleepy tavern on the edge of a residential neighborhood. As we closed in on the establishment, our sense of excitement grew. Kids were walking all over the streets and getting in and out of cars. Meanwhile, available parking spaces became more and more scarce. Once we were within two or three blocks of the tavern there was no place to park. “I guess we should’ve got here earlier,” I said as I turned a corner and headed away from the bar in search of a spot.

We finally found one several blocks away and hiked back to the club. I carried my 1967 Gibson SG Standard electric guitar, switching hands regularly so as not to cramp my fingers too much before performing before the wild, raucous crowd that followed us wherever we went.

When we arrived at the Village Tavern it was brightly lit and crawling with young people. Kids were standing around in the parking lot, getting in and out of cars, and going in and out of the bar. The party spirit was heavy in the air. “Hey Jamie!” said someone I didn’t know. “Jamie, how ya doin?” asked another stranger. “Are you ready to rock, my man?”

As we walked through the front door we were immediately assaulted by a wave of hot, stale, humid air permeated with the smell of beer, sweat,

and cigarette smoke. The guy carding people at the door recognized me right away, smiled and waved us in. The place was packed to the gills! I had to hold my guitar case in front of me as I walked to cut a path through the crowd. Joyce followed closely behind holding onto my belt loop so we wouldn't get separated.

After four years of development it seemed that my bandmates and I finally found the right combination of people and music. Black Rose was a hit and bar owners were falling all over themselves to get us - and our following - into their clubs.

From the spring of 1973 when I first started performing live shows through the spring of 1976, when I graduated high school, I performed at uncountable events: school dances, benefits, local clubs, concerts, and scores of private parties. During that time my band mates and I developed a huge loyal following - a virtual hoard of kids that turned eighteen years old en masse during the years 1974 -1978.

The legal drinking age has always been twenty-one in Pennsylvania but in the mid-seventies it was eighteen in New Jersey. Hence, it was natural for droves of kids who were over eighteen, yet still under twenty-one, (and anyone who could pass for eighteen!) to head over the border to the New Jersey club scene just a few miles away.

The idea for what eventually became Black Rose started in the spring of 1975 when a friend of mine introduced me to a record called *Delaney and Bonnie On Tour With Eric Clapton*. This "blue-eyed soul" super group recording blew me away! After three years of thinking about and developing rock bands I was inspired to create a new band that made the kind of incredible sound that I heard on that record. I shared it with my singer/guitar player friend, Jimmy, and he was just as inspired as I was. So, we endeavored to use the Delaney and Bonnie super group as a model for a group of our own.

Like the Delaney and Bonnie group, Black Rose was fronted by two lead singers. We had Eddie on drums, Scott on keyboard, Gary on bass, myself on guitar, and Jimmy & Mark on lead vocals.



Jimmy at the Village Tavern

We nicknamed Jimmy “Laggin' Jim” because he was so laid back all the time. He was a nice looking guy with a cheery disposition. He had long strawberry blonde hair that he usually pulled back into a ponytail. He had thick, reddish “pork chop” sideburns that reminded me of Duane Allman. The man could sing! I always thought that his natural talent came from his Eastern European heritage. He had a thick voice with a fabulous tone. Jimmy loved the

blues and so he mostly sang the blues or blues based songs in our repertoire. He also played some guitar and harmonica.



Mark in May 1976

Mark was the archetype Italian stallion - tall, dark haired, handsome, muscular, good-natured, vigorous, athletic, hard working, and hard playing. Mark was a team player and had a way of talking to people so he usually took care of the band’s business affairs.

Mark was tough and seemingly fearless. I always felt safe in a rowdy bar whenever he was around because I knew that he could, and would neutralize anyone who tried to give any of us trouble. He had a lighter vocal style than Jimmy: more “McCartney-esque.” Jimmy and Mark complemented each other’s styles very nicely. This enabled us to perform a large variety of songs that we all loved.

Typically Jimmy and Mark got into the spirit of performing by spending a few minutes pretending to box and “slapping each other upside the head.” Jimmy would approach Mark with his fists up, challenging him. Mark would laugh and say something like, “You’re crazy, man! Don’t make me hurt you!!” Jimmy would respond, “I’ll knock you in the dirt!” and advance on him. Mark would then break into his Muhammad Ali routine complete with fancy footwork and jabbing.

“You don’t get it, do ya? I’m the greatest of all time! Float like butterfly! Sting like a bee!! I been whoopin’ chumps like you since you were in diapers!!!” A flurry of slaps and jabs would commence which usually ended with Mark tying Jimmy’s arms and legs into a knot. Of course Jimmy would never admit defeat saying, “Okay chump, is it uncle or do I have to hurt you some more?!” Mark would respond, “Do you see this face? I’m pretty! And I’ll always be pretty because chumps like you can’t touch me!” This wacky banter was their little ritual that got them in the right mood for having fun on stage and entertaining the crowd.



Jimmy & Mark in May 1976



Eddie rehearsing @ Scott's house 10/30/76

Ed was a great character and a good friend. He had a ridiculous sense of humor. I think that was primarily why we got along so well. I usually stood near him when we were jamming. We smiled at each other and rocked out. We usually shared a large glass of beer or

water while we were on stage and if the glass was with one of us, the other would say, "Hey, share the wealth, share the wealth!" Ed and I really got into the band's image. When we weren't performing we were usually over at his house lifting weights or out running to improve our stamina. We believed that if we were in good shape, then we could play longer, harder... and we would look better.

Scott was a real "music lessons" type. He had ear-length brown hair that was usually a bit scruffy, and a peach-fuzzy beard that clung to his chin like a light fungus. He was new to all of us because he was only sixteen but he was already an accomplished keyboard player. His years



Scott rehearsing with Black Rose 10/30/76

of practice and training enabled him to play virtually anything from jazz to classical. Scott was by far the most technical player in the band. But he also had an incredible talent for improvisation. In Black Rose he played blazing solos that left me awestruck. He could play complex bass lines with his left hand while improvising with his right hand. I never saw anything like it before or since! I had a blast complimenting his work with my guitar playing. (Scott made excellent contributions to several tracks on my CD "It's Been So Long." Thanks Scotty!)

In those days, Scott's bane was alcohol. That was a problem for the band because, even though he could legally work in a bar, he couldn't legally drink in a bar. He did anyway, though, and, typically, by our fourth set he was skunk drunk and would sit in front of his piano with his glasses

drooped at the end of his nose... utterly unable to play! When that happened we all looked at each other knowingly and then one of us would sneak up behind him and turn his amp down all the way.

For the record, I want to say that Scott gave up drinking long ago and for many years he has been a successful, professional keyboard player and a body builder... not to mention a fine fellow. Everyone has some kind of compulsion or addiction. I know I do. I only mentioned Scott's former drinking problem because it played a central role in how this story plays out.

Gary was a bit of a mystery to us all. None of us knew him before he answered an ad that we put in the paper for a bass player. He was about 5'7" and his straight brown hair was cropped into bangs. When we performed he typically wore one of those 70's styled polyester suits with enormous lapels. Typically, when our gigs ended, none of us saw him or heard from him until the next gig or rehearsal.

Anyway, back to the night of Saturday March 5, 1977! The kids followed us over the border in droves. It was a very rowdy time and it was common for the evening of loud music, drunkenness, debauchery, and madness to end with a big brawl out in the parking lot. It was also common for people who



Black Rose at a gig 12/27/76 Jim, Mark, Jamie

were leaving the bar to throw beer bottles and cans on neighboring lawns, pee on trees and parked cars, and sometimes even to pass out in the middle of people's yards! It wasn't pretty but we didn't ask or tell people to act that way! We just wanted to play and have fun...

Roebing , NJ was a small, quiet residential town and it didn't take long for the town's people to start thinking of Black Rose and the goings on at the Village Tavern as a public nuisance. Jimmy told me that, one day, he was there in the afternoon playing darts when several locals who happened to be in the bar hassled him about our crowd. The local police started regularly showing up in response to noise complaints and the owner was repeatedly warned to get the situation under control. We were all having too good of a time and making too much money, though, and we just laughed the warnings off. What we didn't know was that there was a certain New Jersey State Trooper, Sgt. Devlin (none of us can remember his real name), who lived only a few blocks from the club. He was not at all happy with the way the problem was being handled. He wanted it to end and it wasn't ending so, apparently, he decided to put an end to it himself.

On the evening of March 5th, 1977 we were rockin' out our first set when a couple of under-cover ABC (NJ liquor control) officers entered the bar and infiltrated the crowd in order to observe the situation. They had apparently checked everyone in the band's background beforehand and discovered that Scott was under eighteen. We had warned Scott repeatedly to stay away from the booze but he wasn't heeding.

On this particular night the agents stood in the shadows and watched as our Scotty acquired and then drank an entire pitcher of beer during our first break. That was all that they needed.

We had just started our second set when suddenly, from our perspective, there was confusion in the crowd over by the bar as the agents flashed their badges and confronted the owner/bartender who had given Scott the suds.

Next they went directly to Mark, the apparent leader of the band, and demanded to see Scott's identification. Mark tried talking to the ABC officers, hoping that Scott would, perhaps, use the moment to acquire a valid

id from someone (This was before the days of picture id's). One of the officers was cordial but the other one got cocky with him and gave him a hard time. I can still see Mark's face as he tried to reason with the guy. "Hey, look pal. I'm twenty-three years old. I have every right to be here and to drink or not to drink as I please. It so happens I'm not drinkin'. That's because I'm workin'. You ain't got nothin' on me." In the meantime, Scott was unable to dig up an id on the spot so, after the agents finished with Mark they confronted Scott. When he was unable to produce proof of being over eighteen, they arrested him and took him away. What we didn't know was that: (1) they apparently expected the band to stop playing and; (2) the cocky ABC agent was angry because Mark stood up to him.

Once they were gone and the crowd settled down we decided, after some deliberation, to finish up the gig without keyboards. Meanwhile, out in the parking lot, Scott was being loaded into a paddy wagon as a large contingent of NJ State Troopers arrived. The cocky ABC agent told Sgt. Devlin all about his dealings with Mark. When they heard the band start playing again Sgt. Devlin was enraged and marched his men into the bar. Objectives: get Mark, stop the band, and disperse the crowd.

We were in the middle of a faithful rendition of ***Bring It On Home To Me*** when suddenly the door flew open and a squadron of New Jersey State Troopers entered the room. They were wearing black leather jackets without badges, black steel-lined gloves, blue riot helmets, and they were holding clubs over their heads! They moved swiftly and aggressively through the room shoving anyone who got in their way... apparently trying to provoke the crowd. People began to swear at them. The band stopped playing and Mark spoke reassuringly into the microphone, "It's all right. Everybody calm down. If we all just produce our id's and cooperate, then everything will be cool."

As Mark spoke, Sgt. Devlin approached him and grunted, "**Get the hell away from that microphone!**" Mark turned to face him, his hands gestured compliance as he said, "Okay, I don't want any trouble." Mark turned away from Sgt. Devlin toward Jimmy and said, "What the hell is going on?" We were all confused because, as far as we knew, the ABC guys left with Scott and that was that. Now, all the sudden, the place was crawling with belligerent cops. Then suddenly, inexplicably, Sgt. Devlin stepped up onto the stage and sucker punched Mark on the left side of his head with his steel-lined glove. From that moment on everything seemed to move in slow motion. Mark reacted instinctively and instantaneously in self-defense. Before anyone could think or say anything, he spun around and punched Sgt. Devlin square on the chin, sending him sprawling backwards off the stage and onto his butt on the floor! Then someone threw a bottle that bounced off of a cop helmet and it was all over. The cops went berserk and started clubbing anyone who was in reach as more cops crashed into the room through every door and window in the place! (This real scene inspired a similar fictional moment in my wacky short story called [*News Flash! Guess Who Came To Dinner?*](#)) The crowd answered the attack with a volley of bottles and whatever else could be used to repel the club happy cops!

A half-dozen Cops appeared out of nowhere and descended upon Mark. One grabbed him from behind with a club around his throat. They dragged him across the stage, bashing him with their batons, while knocking over microphones, band members, guitars, drums, and lights. Jimmy's guitar case was trampled and crushed. I just happened to have been on the other side of Mark as this event unfolded so I didn't get trashed in the melee like the others did. Since I had no weapon or body armor it was obvious that there was nothing that I could do to help Mark. Not being the brawling type I looked upon the riot in utter amazement... All hell had broken loose!! The cops were viciously clubbing anyone within reach and trashing the entire room in the process!!

My mind turned to survival. I tore off my guitar and threw it into its case just as the mob of policemen who were beating up Mark knocked over our light tree on the other side of the stage. I watched in horror as it toppled over and smashed through a window sending a shower of sparks into the air! Fearing the possibility of a fire I dove for the power cords, which happened to have been on my side of the stage, and yanked them out of the wall. Whew! That was a close one!!

At this same moment, my friend Kevin (who hosts this website) watched in amazement from the back of the room as the light tree went down with its shower of sparks and decided that the situation was way out of control. Luckily for him, and a few of his friends, they were standing next to a window that had just been bashed out by a cop breaking into the room from the porch outside. Kevin and his friends slipped out the window and escaped unnoticed.

Meanwhile, Jimmy saw me throw my guitar into its case and tried to make it over to his guitar so he could get it out of harm's way when suddenly he was blocked by the most amazing sight: a State Trooper dressed in a hockey outfit! He wore a helmet with a mesh facemask and padding on his elbows and knees. He wore a baseball cap underneath the helmet with the visor sticking out the back! He had a much bigger club than the other cops: about 4 feet long... the kind that one can wield with two hands. What a psycho! Apparently he was dressed for an evening of fun clubbing people! Jimmy tried to explain that he just wanted to put his guitar in a safe place but the hockey trooper threatened to bash his head in if he tried to pass. Then Jimmy looked into the crowd and saw our friend Lori trying to stop a cop from clubbing one of her friends. The cop clubbed her in the head to shut her up and she went down. Much to Jimmy's amazement she got up again and got right back in the cop's face... so he cracked her in the head again. She

went down again... and she got up again! So the cop clubbed her in the head again!! Fearing for her life, Jimmy called out to her, "**Lori! Stay down!!**"

While this was happening I was looking frantically for Joyce. I finally caught sight of her and I couldn't believe my eyes! She was apparently drunk and standing right behind a pair of cops who were busy clubbing people. "Stop that!" she slurred. "That isn't very nice!! Cut that out!!" I bolted into the fray, grabbed her by the back of her collar, dragged her back to my side of the stage, threw her into the corner, sat on her, and propped my guitar case up in front of both of us!

From that vantage point I witnessed one of the most brutal events I have ever seen. Those six, or so, cops had dragged Mark over to the opposite wall. One had him by the hair and was bashing his head against the wall while the others were beating his entire body to a pulp with clubs. His brother was screaming and thrashing while several of his friends held him back from jumping in. Meanwhile, in the middle of the room, the other cops were having the time of their lives clubbing everyone they could get close to. That's when I saw the psycho cop in the hockey outfit. He screamed like a banshee as he bounced his weight from foot to foot and then lunged into the crowd to inflict a blow. Some kids were laying on the floor bleeding, crying, bruised, battered and hysterical. Others were stumbling around bleeding, hacking, crying, and trying to get away from the relentless blows. It was absolute mayhem!! Joyce and I were very lucky to have ended up pretty much hidden behind the PA stack and my guitar case.

When the insanity finally subsided, the cops herded everyone out of the room. A cop caught sight of me behind the guitar case, walked briskly over, pointed his club in my face, and grunted, "Get outta there!" We stood up and walked out in front of the stage just in time to see Mark as they took him away. He was barely conscious or recognizable as two cops dragged him out by his arms with his feet dragging. He was bleeding, sputtering, and

gasping for air. Every visible part of his body was black, purple and red with blood and bruises. Joyce started crying and I just stood there horrified, wondering if I would ever see him alive again.

The police set up a table at the front door of the bar and checked everybody's id before they left. Those who had appropriate identification were allowed to leave. Those who didn't were arrested. Joyce was only sixteen at the time and she clung to me desperately as we approached the table. She did not want to go with those crazed cops! When we arrived at the table Joyce started crying again as she explained that she was underage but that she was with the band. I nodded and held up my guitar case as Joyce begged them not to arrest her. For some reason the cops let her go. I never could figure out why, but I sure was glad. Joyce probably would've gone hysterical if they tried to take her away and who knows what would've happened then! The interesting surprise was that only a few people were actually found to be underage in the bar. Most of the people who were arrested were charged for their conduct during the riot.

Meanwhile, out in the parking lot, Mark and several dozen other kids were being loaded into the paddy wagon with Scott. They handcuffed Mark to some drunken character that kept mouthing off to the cops when they weren't looking. Thinking that Mark was the one mouthing off, Sgt. Devlin, who sucker punched Mark in the first place, responded by beating him some more. After a few of these incidents Mark finally said to the drunk guy, "**WOULD YOU SHUT UP?!!**" Then Mark faced Sgt. Devlin and said, "You think you're tough, sucker punching me and then ganging up on me with your girlfriends and now hitting me while I have handcuffs on. You're a coward! I could still take you on! You think you're tough? Then take off these cuffs and let's go at it one-on-one right now. I'm half dead but I'll take you apart! Then we'll see what kind of big man you really are!!"

Joyce and I made it back to my car and we got out of that town as fast as we could. We saw a lot of our friends on the road leading to the highway but no one acknowledged us. I saw Jimmy getting into his car so I stopped, rolled down my window and yelled, "Hey Jim! Do you know anything about Mark?" Jimmy looked grim and said, "I don't know, man, but I hope they take him to a hospital!"

Scores of kids showed up at area hospital emergency rooms to have their injuries treated. Some of them were serious.

News of the incident traveled fast and our local paper carried the story the next day. I couldn't believe it! The New Jersey State Police lied about everything!! The newspaper account depicted an outnumbered, helpless police force responding to a complaint. They said that they had no choice but to defend themselves against an irrational, drunken, angry mob that viciously attacked them for no reason.

Thankfully, Mark survived. After arriving at the police station he was still bleeding so they took him to the hospital where he spent the night. He went home early the next morning. Ed and I went over to his house to visit him. His head was totally misshapen from swelling. He had two black eyes and every square inch of his entire body was covered with welts, cuts, and bruises.

After "the brawl," Black Rose became taboo. Bar owners in the area stopped hiring us because they didn't want their places trashed plus, no one was making big money from having us anymore because the hoards of kids that used to come to see us dwindled to only a few dozen.

Scott was warned by the cops not to return to a New Jersey bar until he was over eighteen... and that they'd be watching. That meant that we were out one totally awesome keyboard player. So, over the course of the next few weeks and months the band slowly died and the Village Tavern closed its doors forever. I guess the cops achieved their objective.

Years after the event Jimmy discovered one day that one of his co-workers lived in Roebing. Jimmy asked him if he remembered the brawl. The guy said he remembered it very well and that the whole town hated the Village Tavern, Black Rose, and the kids who followed us around.

Upon reflection, Jimmy remembered that there was always one table of young women from Roebing who sat in the same spot every time we performed there... except for the night of the raid... for 'some reason.' Apparently the whole event was a town conspiracy designed to get rid of us once and for all.

You can't fight city hall, right? WRONG!!! Mark was the only one of all who were arrested that night who didn't plead guilty to whatever they were charged with just to put an end to it. In the months after the brawl New Jersey's District Attorney visited me several times. He kept asking me to tell and retell what I saw that night. I was one of the few people there who wasn't drunk so my account was important to him. He kept trying to get me to say that Mark struck Sgt. Devlin first, which was apparently what Sgt. Devlin wrote in his report, but that wasn't how it happened and he couldn't get me to contradict myself on any detail of the event.

Looking back from my current perspective, I'm sure that I wouldn't be happy if there was a rowdy bar in my neighborhood with people peeing on my car, throwing bottles and cans on my yard, and passing out on my front lawn. On the other hand, none of the members of Black Rose condoned such activities. We had no control over the people who came to see us. All of these things may have been a public nuisance but they pale in contrast to a State Police force that would enter a properly licensed private business establishment under the authority of the state and incite a riot so that they could beat everyone up so they would never come back. After all, the cornerstone of this great country is that we live under the rule of law. What Sgt. Devlin and his buddies did that night was the kind of thing that the

Gestapo did in totalitarian Nazi Germany. No one from Roebling, NJ ever ended up in the hospital beaten to a pulp because of Black Rose or it's following. If they wanted to get rid of us they could've rezoned the property or passed a strict noise ordinance with a heavy fine. The fact is that the cops lied about virtually every detail of that evening's events in their reports and to the media... that was an utterly inexcusable abuse of power and of the public trust. Their total lack of professionalism and employment of banana republic tactics was astounding to me. Thankfully, because of Mark's tenacity, integrity, and willingness to sacrifice, they didn't get away with it.

After five years of calling Mark in and out of court, basically trying to force him to drop his not guilty plea by dragging him through endless bench warrants for nothing, he finally had his day in court. It turned out that Sgt. Devlin already had several complaints of police brutality filed against him. Devlin lost his temper in court while being questioned and started yelling about how tough he is, how he lifts weights, and how he doesn't take any crap from punks... Mark was acquitted... **Lawsuit time!** The New Jersey State Police settled with Mark quickly and quietly out of court. It's nice to know that every once in a while something good happens in the world!

For many months after "the brawl" I was gripped with fear every time I saw a police officer or a squad car. It was my first real taste of tyranny at the hands of those who are, at the same time, evil, corrupt... and sworn to serve and protect the public and to tell the truth under oath.

In the years that have passed I have realized, thankfully, that most cops are good cops and that I have nothing to fear from them. In fact, I have developed great respect for those who put their lives on the line for the public good... especially since 9/11.

I have also learned that, as long as I have nothing to hide, I can stand against bad cops, abusive people, and scam artists when I encounter them.

The same spirit inspires them all... and as long as I stay right with God, His Spirit will prevail in any situation.

The End

*The events and characters in this story represent my opinions, the best of my recollections, and interviews that I conducted with people who were there. Any representation of thoughts inside the minds of members of the New Jersey State Police, the New Jersey District Attorney, or citizens of Roebling New Jersey are purely speculative on my part.



Jamie Thompson is a writer, musician, songwriter, photographer, videographer, husband, and a stay-at-home-dad with two small children.

Sign up for Jamie's [free monthly newsletter](#) and be among the first to read new short stories, download free mp3's from Jamie's growing music archives, and get the news on Jamie's family and creative endeavors.

Check out Jamie's website at www.jamiethompson.net.

Read more short stories online at [The Rocklore Files](#).

Check out Jamie's audio CD release ["It's Been So Long."](#)

Send your favorite birthday person a [FREE happy birthday e-card](#) with a free mp3 download of Jamie Thompson's original happy birthday song!

Please feel free to share this ebook with anyone that you think might enjoy it. Our only request is that you give it away and that you not modify its content.