



WELCOME TO MY JUNGLE

An Unauthorized Account of How
a Regular Guy Like Me Survived
Years of Touring with Guns N' Roses,
Pet Wallabies, Crazy Groupies,
Axl Rose's Moth Extermination System,
& Other Perils on the Road with One of
the Greatest Rock Bands of All Time



CRAIG DUSWALT

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By Craig Duswalt



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HOW THIS ALL STARTED

HOW I GOT INTO THE “BUSINESS”

I had toured with Air Supply for about six years (two of those years with Doug Goldstein, who would later become the manager for Guns N’ Roses). But I was pretty damn lucky to get in with Air Supply. In fact, I never even had to fill out an application!

It was July 1983. I had just graduated college—State University of New York at Oswego. I was a business major with a theater minor, but I was very involved in theater. I had starred in numerous college productions in my junior and senior years. Acting is in my blood forever.

My first job out of college was at the Westbury Music Fair in Long Island. Westbury Music Fair was a 3,000-seat, in-the-round venue that housed plays and intimate concerts. I was a backstage runner, a gopher, the bottom man on the totem pole. When acts came into town, I would pick them up at the airport. Or I would pick them up at their hotel, and bring them to the gig



for sound check. And I always had to make sure they had what they needed backstage.

I only held this job for about a month, because I was about to meet someone who would change my life.

One of the shows that came to Westbury while I was there was the well-known musical *The Sound of Music*. It starred theater veterans Theodore Bikel and Roberta Peters. Once again, I was in charge of making sure all the actors had what they needed. To my surprise, the producers needed something a little different than the usual water or coffee. They needed a couple of actors to play bit parts. I was chosen to play one of the Nazi soldiers.

In between getting shoe polish and kiwi slices for the cast, I was so happy to be “acting” in an Equity (professional) play. Granted, I was a glorified extra, but I was on the stage with Theodore Bikel and Roberta Peters! I became pretty close to some members of the cast during the two-week run. It was a great experience, but nothing close to what was about to happen.

The Australian pop band Air Supply came to the Westbury Music Fair to do two shows—one on Friday night and one on Saturday night.

What I did not know at the time was that Air Supply had just fired their band assistant because of excessive drug use.

I worked the show on Friday night, getting drinks, supplying towels, and so on. I met the two lead members of the band, Russell Hitchcock and Graham Russell, as well as their security guard, Bob Street. Nothing special, just “Hi!” and some small talk. But I was working my ass off that night, running around for everyone—but always with a smile and a positive attitude.

The next day I found out my mom and her friend had tickets to see Air Supply that night. I wasn’t supposed to work that night but because my mom was going I asked my boss if I could come in again to work the second show.

Two weeks earlier, out of nowhere, knowing that Air Supply was coming to town, my mom said to me, “What if they ask you to go on tour with them, would you go?”

I said, “Who?”

“Air Supply, what if they ask you to tour with them?”

I said to my mom, “And why would they do that? You’re crazy! Where do you come up with this stuff?”

I never gave it another thought.

I arrived at work about 2 p.m. to help get things ready for the Saturday-night show. At about 5 p.m., Air Supply arrived to do a sound check. Once again, there were casual hellos from the band members. But Bob Street talked to me a little about my interests, and how I liked working at Westbury. About a half hour later Bob and the band went back to the hotel to rest before the show, which was sold out.

As I got the backstage area ready, the excited crowd took their seats. About an hour later the warm-up band took the stage. I peeked out from behind the backstage curtain, and saw my mom and her friend in the audience.

Air Supply arrived through the Stage Door entrance. As the band members went to their dressing rooms, Bob Street pulled me aside and asked me how much I made working at Westbury. I told him about \$150 a week. (Don’t laugh. Back in 1983, \$150 a week wasn’t bad.)

Bob said, “How would you like to quadruple that?”

So many things went through my mind at that moment, one of them being, “What the hell does he want me to do to make \$600 a week?”

My mind went to some very dark places. But I was twenty-one—and I was thinking to myself, *Hell, whatever he says, I’ll do it.* I wouldn’t really, but that’s what I was thinking.

So I said, “Hell yeah . . . doing what?”

I was told that they needed a person to take care of their backstage area while they were on the road. They liked the way I worked the day before, so they wanted to offer me a job to join them on their world tour.

I was in shock. I think I said, “When do I leave?”

Bob said, “Come to our hotel tomorrow to iron out the details with our tour manager, John Slattery.”

We shook hands and he went into a dressing room. I stood there dumbfounded, wondering what the hell just happened. Did I just get a job touring with one of the biggest pop bands around?

You bet your sweet ass I did. I would be leaving on Monday for a world tour with Air Supply, one of the most successful bands of the 1980s. And then I realized what my mom had said to me two weeks ago.

Holy crap—my mom’s a psychic!

I was busting to tell the world what just happened. When the warm-up band finished I very coolly walked over to where my mom and her friend were sitting in the audience.

I casually said to my mom, “Do you remember what you asked me two weeks ago?”

She did not recall. (There goes the “my mom’s a psychic” theory.)

“About touring with Air Supply,” I reminded her.

“Oh yeah.”

“Well, as crazy as this sounds, you were right.”

“What are you talking about?”

“They asked me to tour with them. I leave on Monday.”

At first my mom let out a small squeal, so as to not freak out or scare the other 3,000 people in the theater. But then she whispered to me, “Are they gay?”

Not a politically correct statement now, but in 1983 . . . Plus, she’s a mom, and she was just concerned for her son.

(Let me set the record straight. Contrary to some beliefs, most of the members of Air Supply in 1983 were not gay. The only gay member of the band was their very talented keyboard player, Frank Esler-Smith. Frank became a very good friend of mine over the years, and it was a very sad day for me when Frank passed away from AIDS-related causes in 1995.)

My mom finally regained her composure.

As I left her to return backstage, I heard another squeal.

Again, it was her.

I just lowered my head and rushed behind the backstage curtain.

The next day I came back to the band's hotel and met with John Slattery, and I was "officially" hired on the spot.

That night I called all my friends from Deer Park, New York, and I threw my own last-minute going-away party.

The band sent a limo to my house the next morning, and it took me to JFK Airport. I hopped on a flight to Wallingford, Connecticut, checked into the hotel, rode with the band to the venue, and watched them take the stage.

As I watched the concert from the side of the stage, I just remember thinking to myself, *Wow! Damn! This is going to be very, very cool.* And it was.

I toured with Air Supply for six amazing years. They all remain great friends of mine to this day.

A side note: In 2006, I was on the Board of Advisors for the Michael Hoefflin Foundation, a Santa Clarita, California, charity that helps families with children who are diagnosed with cancer. The foundation asked me if I could get a band for their big fund-raiser. Twenty years after I toured with them, I asked Graham and Russell, and their manager, Barry Siegal, if they would do me a favor and perform for this charity. They didn't ask any questions—they were happy to do it. (They put on an awesome show!)

I owe most of my success to Russell Hitchcock, Graham Russell, Bob Street, and Doug Goldstein. Thank you, guys!

W



In between working for Air Supply and Guns N' Roses, I was employed as a waiter at Robaire's French Restaurant in Los Angeles. I was trying to make it as an actor, and the typical job for most actors in Los Angeles is being a waiter simply because it gives actors time to go on auditions during the day while waiting on tables at night. It was a very flexible job with very flexible hours.

One night, while working my station in the main dining room, a gentleman at one of my tables asked me to come over. He introduced himself as Hamilton Farmer, a psychic that had appeared on talk shows, including *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson*.

"I don't usually do this, but because the feeling is so strong I felt I had to tell you something," Hamilton said.

For a moment it felt like he was trying to pick me up. Last time something like that happened I was a waiter at the Hamburger Hamlet Restaurant on Sunset Boulevard, also in Los Angeles. Another gentleman, Herbert Kenwith, a director for successful television shows such as *Good Times*, had asked me if I was an actor, and I said yes, and ten minutes later I had an audition the next day for the soap opera *General Hospital*.

He also asked me out to dinner.

I quickly told him, in a very nice way, that I wasn't interested in anything else, except maybe auditioning for *General Hospital*.

He understood.

And then he said, "Be at Gower Studios at 10 a.m. They'll be expecting you."

Now this stuff doesn't happen every day, but I've always believed you often meet people for a reason.

So because I still really didn't believe him, the next day I called the show and asked if I indeed had an audition. They said yes. I hung up the phone and raced over to Gower Studios, read for the *General Hospital* casting director, and got cast on the show as a waiter in Duke's Club. Typecasting? Maybe.

So I looked back at Hamilton Farmer.

"Tell me what?" I asked.

He explained again his extensive television resume and said, "You're probably an actor, right?"

"How'd you guess? You must be a psychic," I said sarcastically. Again, all waiters are actors.

He smiled.

"You are going to be very well known. In fact, you are going to be famous someday, and it has something to do with the letter w."

I didn't know what to think. I wanted to believe him, but I don't really believe in the whole psychic thing. And as if that weren't enough, he added, "And, you will be bigger than Bruce Willis." As a young actor at the time, I thought to myself, "Damn, that would be really cool."

He had my full attention now.

We continued to talk for a while, all the time totally convinced that I would be very successful someday.

I kept asking him what the *w* was, and for him to try harder to see (psychically) what the *w* was. I guess that was too difficult, because he kept "seeing" only the letter *w*.

So over the years I thought about what the *w* might be. Was it the first letter of a word? That seemed to make the most sense.

The word "writer" came to mind right away. Maybe I was going to become a famous writer. I was already a part-time writer. Again, so is everyone else in Los Angeles.

I had recently won a screenwriting fellowship for a screenplay I wrote from the Chesterfield Film Company sponsored by Amblin Entertainment, Steven Spielberg's production company. But even though I came close to selling a screenplay or two numerous times, that never panned out.

Then I thought the *w* might be my new stage name—Williamson—and that meant I was going to be a famous actor. I had recently changed my last name from Duswalt to Williamson for a while because I thought Duswalt might be too hard to pronounce. Well, aside from a few stints on television, and numerous stage plays, that didn't pan out either.

And while I didn't really believe in psychic readings, over the years I kept thinking what that *w* was, and how that *w* would put me on the map.

But all these *w*'s were the first letter in words and names. And Hamilton Farmer had said from the beginning, that he saw only the letter *w* alone. So, I think I was continually trying to put a square peg in a circle.

And then one day it dawned on me, years after touring with Guns N' Roses. And though it seems obvious now, it never hit me before.

I am currently a professional speaker and author and creator of the RockStar System For Success—How to Achieve RockStar Status in Your Industry. I have become very successful in the seminar industry in a short period, and I truly feel it's because I speak from the heart and I have a great brand—RockStar.

I teach entrepreneurs and corporations how to think outside the box and market themselves and their businesses, all like a RockStar.

So I thought to myself, even though I toured with Air Supply for six-plus years, the band that really put me on the map in the music industry was Guns N' Roses. Because of my associations with GNR numerous doors were opened for me and I met tons of influential people. So, it had to have something to do with Guns

N' Roses. But there's no w in Guns N' Roses. And I worked specifically for Axl Rose—again no w.

But then I remembered. Axl Rose's full name is W. Axl Rose.

And there you have it. The letter w. And it is all by itself.

My association with W. Axl Rose and Guns N' Roses helped me start my RockStar brand, and it introduced me to very influential people, who remain in my life to this day.

So I guess Mr. Hamilton Farmer did in fact “see” the letter w. Alone.

Wow!

Now, I know I'm not even close to a household name, and I'm definitely not more famous than Bruce Willis, yet, but in the semi-nar industry I am very well known because of my RockStar brand. And right now that is more than good enough for my family and me. I personally don't want to get too famous. I've seen what happens to people that have become very famous—and I would not wish it on my worst enemy.

I'm very happy with my success, and I'm very happy that I can walk down the street without being recognized.

I'm also very happy that I finally think I know what Hamilton Farmer saw back in 1985.

SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?



October 15, 1991, had started out like every other day of the past few months. I went to the local gym in Playa del Rey, California, to watch my girlfriend at the time—Kim Evenson, *Playboy* Playmate, September 1984—swim laps in a pool because I had nothing else to do. I was a starving actor making very little money, so watching Kim work out was the highlight of my day. Pretty sad.

My pager (cell phones in 1991 were brand-new at best) went off. I didn't recognize the number but I called it back from the pay phone (yes, there were still pay phones in 1991) near the outdoor pool. It was Doug Goldstein, the new manager of Guns N' Roses.

Doug and I had toured together for years with Air Supply in the mid-1980s and we became very good friends. It's funny, I was the one who showed Doug "the ins and outs" of touring and he became one of the most influential people in rock n' roll in the 1990s.

Anyway, Doug asked me if I was ready to go back on the road. Axl Rose needed a *second* personal assistant for the upcoming Use Your Illusion world tour. The words "second assistant" sort of confused me because I never knew that someone would need more than one assistant. How foolish of me. I found out quickly that one assistant was not enough for Axl Rose while on the road.

So, I look at Kim in her bathing suit while she's doing one of her "5,000" laps, and I weigh the situation. Stay in Playa del Rey and watch Kim swim, or go on the road with the hottest band in the world. Again. Come to the gym every day and watch Kim swim 5,000,000 laps or go on the road with Guns N' Roses as Axl Rose's "second" personal assistant, whatever the hell that meant.

Damn, I thought to myself. Tough decision.

But I knew what I had to do. And that was go on tour with the biggest band in the world at that time, and break up with Kim via a phone call from far, far away.

MY FIRST DAY WITH GUNS N' ROSES

Being Axl's second personal assistant was more like being Blake's first assistant. Blake Stanton was Axl's personal assistant at the

time, but he was so busy he needed an assistant. So, at first, I was technically the assistant to the assistant. But I was really Axl's assistant because I was doing everything for him. When Blake left (see the Alone in Germany story), I became Axl's first assistant. Then I needed an assistant, who became Axl's second assistant, or my assistant. (I won't judge you if you need assistance understanding the whole assistant thing.)

My first day on the job, I walked into Axl's living room in the Hollywood Hills. Blake immediately tells me to go get Slash at the Oakwood apartments at the bottom of the hill.

No, "Hi!" Just, "Get Slash."

I was thinking to myself, "Don't you want me to fill out a W-4 first?" Blake was a man of very few words, because as I would realize very soon, he had a lot on his mind.

"He'll be standing in the parking lot wearing black," Blake said.

Go figure. Slash wearing black.

I was really excited because I had never met Slash and on my first day of work he was going to be in my car.

I got in my car and headed back down the hill.

I arrived at the Oakwood apartments and I pulled up to Slash who was standing by himself in the parking lot. He was wearing black. Without saying a word he got in my car.

Now, I understand that I wasn't a scary looking guy, but c'mon. Shouldn't he have at least asked who I was?

Slash got in and said, "Hey."

I said, "Hey," back. "I'm Craig."

"Nice to meet you. You work for Axl now?"

I proudly said, "Yup."

He just smiled. A rather haunting smile at that.

We shook hands and I drove him to Axl's house without either of us saying another word the entire ten-minute ride.

Slash and I would go on to become very good friends. Drinking buddies on the road. In fact my first introduction to Everclear was with Slash. Would love to write about what happened that night, but I really can't remember a thing.

When Slash and I got back to Axl's house, Blake was on the phone.

I heard him say, "Brian, Axl, and I might have a doctor out here that we think can help Freddie . . ."

At first I didn't think anything of it, but as the conversation went on I realized he was talking to Brian May, the lead guitarist of Queen—my favorite band of all time.

I thought, *How cool was that?* First Slash, then we're on the phone with Brian May? This is going to be awesome. And I still hadn't even been introduced to Axl.

Without going into detail of the very confidential phone call, Brian apparently said, "Thanks for the offer, but Freddie was at peace and was ready to move on."

A few minutes later Axl walked out of his bedroom wearing only a pair of shorts. He walked right past me and asked Blake, "What did he say?"

Blake told Axl the outcome of the call and Axl rolled his eyes.

Axl sat on the couch, lit up a cigarette, and said to me, "Hey. I'm Axl."

As if I didn't know.

I walked over to him and shook his hand. "I'm Craig. Very nice to meet you."

And we went to work.

No fireworks, no big celebration for me starting my new, very cool job. Just a regular workday in Axl's house in the Hollywood Hills. The big topic of the day was why did Izzy Stradlin quit Guns N' Roses a few weeks prior? And how are we going to get new guitarist Gilby Clarke up to speed, fast?

Freddie Mercury passed away a few days later.

I am probably one of the biggest Queen fans of all time. I don't collect a lot of Queen stuff but I know pretty much everything there is to know about Queen.

When Freddie Mercury passed away it was a very sad day for me. Axl felt the same way. He was also a huge Queen fan.

I had no idea what direction the next three years of my life would take, but I knew it was going to be very interesting.

I was right.

ALONE IN GERMANY



Somewhere in Germany, four months into my job with Guns N' Roses, I had to run to a local mall to pick up a few things for Axl while he was asleep. I was really tired because I had only had about two hours of sleep myself. That was typical.

In the Guns N' Roses world this is how it works. The band does a show. The show ends between midnight and two in the morning. That's because GNR always went onstage late, which we will discuss later. Then on most nights, Axl would hang out for about two hours after the show in his dressing room. Then Axl, Blake, Axl's bodyguard, Earl, and I would take the limo to a restaurant for some late-night snacks—actually, full-on meals.

Axl hardly ever looked for five-star restaurants. He was very happy with the local Denny's or IHOP, especially because they were often the only restaurants open at 4 a.m.

The three of us nonsingers, all larger in stature than Axl, would order one meal. For me it was usually breakfast. But Axl would order at least three meals from the menu. Chicken fried steak was one of his favorites. He was always so hungry after a show, and he could never decide what he wanted to eat, so he would order multiple items and pick from each plate.

Thanks for checking out this preview of:

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