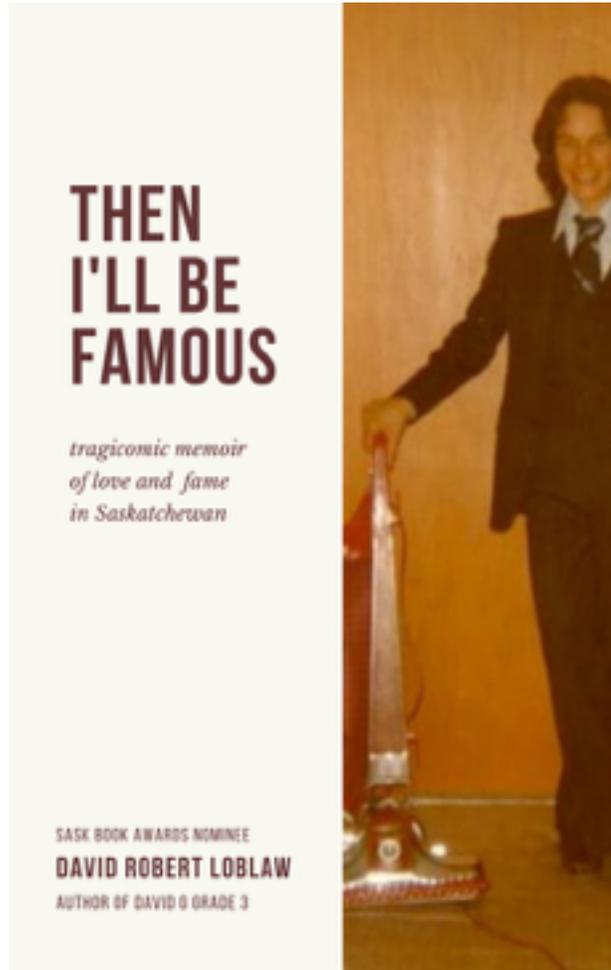


Excerpt from 'Then I'll be Famous' by David Robert Loblaw



Places to buy book at: David G Grade 3.com

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Though I know nothing about music and it gives me zero pleasure, I still go to many, many concerts as a teen. I love the loud spectacle, the nervous energy of a crowd, the mesmerizing glaze of girls in the audience. Everything but the music.

I go to these concerts at the fancy Centre of the Arts or the brand-new AgriDome hockey stadium. Prices of tickets to these concerts seem to be ever-increasing through the 1970s. As a genius futurist and intellectual, I predict the absolute ceiling for concert tickets will be \$20.

Also, as I never smoke, the only reason I always have a Bic butane lighter in my pocket is to fit in with the crowd during the nonsensical encores.

There is a concert coming up in Regina this summer which will be "The One." It's unimaginable that anyone would not want to be at this epic event, the biggest event to hit the City of Regina since the Tornado of 1912.

It's the KISS *Love Gun* concert of 1977.

My complete music collection in my basement bedroom consists of thirteen vinyl LPs and countless eight-track tapes. The LPs are from the Columbia Record Club — one dollar for eleven albums, twelve albums if you knew the secret to filling in the gold bonus box. I had a hard time to get my choices up to twelve. After they arrive, I am fanatical in filling out and mailing the monthly card to avoid Columbia automatically sending and charging me for the Record of the Month. I screw up once and that's why I own Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*.

As we spend so much of our lives driving our cars, having an eight-track player is essential. So much better than crappy cassettes whose thin magnetic tape gets mulched when inserted into a cold cassette player in the winter. You don't notice anything wrong until the music burbles to a stop, and a loud whiny noise comes from the machine. Popping out the cassette and its endless entrails of crumpled tape, you throw it out the window, snarling, "Piece of shit!"

On the other hand, an eight-track tape is near indestructible — it's a solid plastic brick of music. If the tape snaps for whatever reason, a simple bandaid of scotch tape and you're set. If the playhead gets misaligned by your car hitting a bigger-than-usual Regina pothole, you can adjust it with the thumbwheel knob, or if it's really badly double-tracking, by firmly pressing in a matchbook on the top of the cassette.

And eight-track players are the perfect portable music source: the iPod of the '70s. I lay on my floor of my car to unhook my player from its hooks under the console, then carry it inside to my bedroom where I power it by clipping on my battery charger cables to its back. Shoving in the

stereo wires from my Radio Shack speakers, I'm all set to party.

Every week I drive up north Albert to Eddy's Swap-a-Tape, the purple converted school bus parked on the edge of the Avon Shopping Centre (near Scary Nights nightclub), to trade two or more eight-tracks for another used one. I spend hours looking through the wooden rows of endless eight-tracks. Rarely do I pay cash for a brand new one, but for some weird reason, when I see the cover of KISS *Destroyer*, I know I must buy it (even though it's rip-off at \$8.50.) I don't know their music and don't care, but that cover of four bizarre guys stomping on rubble with an apocalyptic landscape intrigues me.

I'm driving home, my new music purchase blasting from my back seat speakers. Literally, "back seat speakers" as I had taken my mom's three-foot-high living-room wooden speakers, put them in my back seat, and hooked them up to my car's eight-track stereo.

I'm racing back to the east end, loving the super-loud punch-the-sky hard rock of KISS until the soft ballad "Beth" appears on track three and everything stops for me.

Beth is the gorgeous girl who sits in front of me in Social Studies class.

When we pass assignments forward to correct, she always smiles and looks me in the eye to say thanks. She never looks at my facial cysts. Beth is the most beautiful girl in the world. I do get distracted by the tube tops of other girls, but Beth also has a perfect smile, ever-growing curves, and has talked to me. She is the one I'm asking to the KISS concert.

Her seat in front of me in Social Studies is empty today, and has been for two weeks. Something strange is going on. I overhear some girls say she has transferred to Balfour, the Protestant high school next door, the one with the special program for girls in her situation. I don't see how that is possible. We haven't even gone on a date yet.

Though I can't see how anyone can fill the place of beautiful Beth, I'm now forced to find someone else to take to the concert of the century. I make a list of the gorgeous babes I work with at Canadian Tire — there are a lot of them, and several have talked to me in the lunch room once.

I have a bit of a relationship with my top pick, Service Desk Donna, as we see each other quite often. Whenever a customer comes into the store to return an auto part purchase, she has to call someone from Auto Parts over the intercom. I race every time I hear her golden voice calling me over the tinny speakers.

I'm squatting in aisle 34, punching red sale stickers onto containers of Turtle Wax polishing compound with my shiny price gun, when I hear her voice in the heavens. Unlike Odysseus who had the foresight to plug his ears with wax to prevent him from hearing the voices of the Sirens, I bolt up, swirl my gun by its cord, and snap it on my belt. I run to the Service Desk, a little out of breath, and Donna bows to me, reaching up to show me the carburetor the customer says is not the right one. With a pass of my hand, I deem it an acceptable exchange or refund. She softly nods at my authority.

The customer leaves and she turns, surprised, to find me still there. This is my chance. I tell her I have an extra ticket

to the KISS concert and ask if she'd like to go with me. She leans over and touches my forearm.

I've calculated she will say one of three probable responses:

- (1) "I've been waiting for you to ask,"
- (2) "There's no one I would rather go with than you," or
- (3) "I want to scream with excitement!"

Instead, she looks me in the eye and says, "You should see a doctor about your face" then turns to help her next customer.

Knowing my dilemma, Darryl, a friend of mine, says his cousin from out of town will be staying at his family's place for the month of August and will probably want to go to the concert with all of us. I ask if she's cute.

"I can't answer that! She's my cousin!" he laughs.

"No, seriously, is she?"

He slaps my shoulder: "Monica will be a great date."

"I don't wanna be stuck with a dog."

I ask for a photo.

Concert Day finally arrives. A dozen of us squeeze in my giant car to head to this epic event, the trunk filled with many two-fours of beer. I park near the Exhibition grounds and we stumble towards Buffalo Days with its massive Conklin midway rides, topped with the giant Ferris wheel and screams from The Zipper. The buzz outside the bright orange Agridome before the concert is electrifying. I've never felt this crazy crowd energy before. Every teen in the entire city, possibly the whole province, is here right now. We don't exactly know what, but we all feel something

important is going to happen tonight. Having KISS play in Regina means we are a world-class city now.

Darryl had indeed shown me a photo of his cousin — quite cute, with long brown Farrah hair — and says he showed her a picture of me.

Monica's parents are driving into town today, dropping her off at Buffalo Days, and we're to meet in front of the Agridome. Once Darryl and I and the others merge into the massive mob outside the concert, we realize that was probably not a good idea. I have her ticket and say I'll look for her.

When she had asked what I looked like, Darryl said he answered, "He always wears black, easy to spot." And for this special day I go all-out: wearing my favourite super-wide black velour pants, a black vest, black poly shirt with wide collars that stick over the shoulders of my black leather jacket glistening with Armor All — propped up on my black boots. And around my neck: a gold pendant Leo necklace. (I hear chicks love astrology.)

The crowd slowly starts to thin as people enter the concert for the opening act. Not knowing anything about or particularly wanting to hear Cheap Trick, I offer to stay out to look for Darryl's cousin, my date, while the others go in. Wandering up and down out front, I think I see her a few times, and ask, "Monica?" Some shocked looks, a few giggles, but mostly I'm ignored.

After awhile, I start to enjoy walking around aimlessly, seeing the night-time razzle-dazzle of the midway, listening to the pumping music coming from inside the Agridome. Many times I leave my sentry to get more beer from my car.

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Only when KISS hits the stage do I recognize any song. Leaning up against a wall, swishing my head to the music, tipping back my beer inside a Coke cup, I forget about Monica and why I'm here. I perk up when 'Rock and Roll All Nite' hits the night sky in Regina, followed by insanely long cheering and yelling for an encore. This is when I decide to go inside, the security guy puzzled on how late I am.

Gripping the first railing I see, I yell-sing to 'Detroit Rock City,' then start to sob along with 'Beth,' sliding down to have a little nap on the cement floor.

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Tell me your stories of being a teen in Regina in the 1970s:

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