



LOU GRAMM

The former lead singer of Foreigner shares his incredible journey through life's challenges and yet he is still able to rock on!

By Helen Marketti

Photo Courtesy of Spectra Records

Lou Gramm spent 26 years as the front man of Foreigner. With a catalog that is an endless list of rock lyrics, his unique voice is heard on Urgent, Hot Blooded, Cold As Ice, Waiting For a Girl Like You, I Want to Know What Love Is, Head Games, Jukebox Hero, Feels Like the First Time, Midnight

Blue and so many more. Reminiscing about the early days and the songs that brought the band its signature sound Lou said, "The louder you cranked them, the better they sounded."

Curiosity raised the question of how the band got their name in the first place. "We had reached a point where we had enough songs written and we were trying to come up with names for the band," explains Lou.

"Every few days one of us would add names to the list. 'Trigger' was almost the name of our band, if you can believe that. Mick (Jones) came up with the name Foreigner because there were three British and three Americans in the band. It sounded cool and looked really nice in writing. The concept of it played well with the other guys in the group, too."

Lou continues, "I am very proud to have been part of that. It helped to shape me as a vocalist and songwriter. Through touring we met a lot of people in the record business and there are many things that I will always cherish." Lou still tours with his own band these days, The Lou Gramm Band that also includes his two brothers. He still plays the familiar hits. "We stay true to the original arrangements. I feel the songs were fine as they were. I want to remain true to the way they were written. So with my songs and a Beatle song or two thrown in, we have a good time."

Fans still flock to see the shows and hear the music. "I know that we (Foreigner) took great pains not to be a 'flavor of the week' type of band. We did not follow trends and we wrote songs that would not be out of style five or ten years later. We wanted the albums we recorded to stand the test of time."

While the accolades were nice for so many years, there was also a downside to being in a band. "It was the long tours," explains Lou. "The more successful an album is, the longer and harder the tour. Foreigner 4 was our biggest album and we toured for year and a half. We played five out of seven nights a week. I would be able to go home to see my wife and two children every four to six weeks and only be able to stay at home one or two days and then it was back on the road. I remember coming home from a tour and seeing my son, Matthew, who was three years old at the time. When he saw me, he started screaming and crying because he didn't even know who I was. It was like a dagger in my heart."

"People think that being in a band is drugging and partying. I believe that a lot of that comes from not being with your family,

not being with the ones you love. You're more-less self medicating yourself."

Life on the road along with the other demands of being in a famous rock band had begun to take their toll on Lou emotionally and physically. There were moments when he knew he had to do something for himself and finally there came a time when he took action. "There was a night in Manhattan that I knew I just couldn't go home nor continue with the way I was. I called a close friend who had been through what I was going through and wanted him to come and get me. He told me to stay where I was and he was on his way. I was on my knees for a good long time because I was asking for the Lord's help. I knew I couldn't do anything until then."

"I went away to a place called, Hazelden in Minnesota. I felt that life was becoming very promising again and didn't want to fall prey to that stuff under any circumstance. Most of the guys in the band were still partying pretty hard and I would find myself in the back lounge. I'd lock myself in there because I didn't want to see or smell any part of what they were doing."

His band mates were verbally supportive but were still "putting the lines on the mirror". "I was hoping they would abstain from that stuff, at least while I was in their midst," said Lou. "Instead of sitting and talking together, they would ask me to leave. I found it harder and harder to continue and it was one of the big reasons why I could not stay with Foreigner. I became a born again Christian in 1992. I finally had gotten rid of my drinking and drugging habits that had haunted me since the early days of Foreigner. I was sick and tired of being sick and tired."

With life seeming to come together and find its natural path for Lou, he was dealt another blow in 1997. "I was having severe headaches and long term memory lapses. It felt worse than a hang over. I had been clean and sober for five years so I knew I wasn't hung over."

Lou continues, "I remember picking up the phone to call my mom and dad at the same number they had for over thirty years and once I dialed the first three numbers, I



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could not remember the last four numbers. I had dialed their number a million times and now I had to look it up. That really shook me. I'd run into people at the grocery store who had been friends of mine for years and could not remember their names."

Lou first went to his doctor where a series of tests were done. "They diagnosed me with a brain tumor," said Lou. "It was on my frontal lobe and about the size of a large egg. They determined that it had been with me since birth. It had tentacles, one of the tentacles was wrapped around my optic nerve, and the other was wrapped around my pituitary gland. It was big enough to start playing games with my life."

"My doctor recommended another doctor for me to see here in Rochester. He said the tumor was so far along that he did not feel it was appropriate for him to operate. He sent me to New York City to another doctor and he also told me it would be very dangerous to operate. So I flew back home thinking that I was going to die. That night I watched a program that showed a doctor in Boston who was using laser treatments on tumors that were previously considered inoperable. I was mesmerized. I was on the phone with his personal secretary the next morning and explained my entire story to her. This was on a Tuesday and she asked me if I could fly to Boston the same day. That Thursday at 4:45 am, they wheeled me into pre-op and at 5:30 am, they put me under. The operation lasted nearly 14 hours. I remember waking up and feeling like I was dead. The doctor told me they got it all and I'll be ok but there was substantial damage done and my healing would be long and tedious."

"My adrenal glands are now defunct and my pituitary gland works about 30%. So I will have to take supplements for the rest of

my life. I had to take so much medication. The steroids really made me balloon up. I had trouble talking in complete sentences. I developed sleep apnea and crashed my truck in three head on collisions so I turned in my license."

With life seeming that it was one challenge after another, Lou has finally reached a point where the tide has turned. He is now off many medications, working out each day and losing weight. "It wasn't until 2004 that the fog started to lift," said Lou. "Life is better. I feel great."

Last year, Lou released a Christian Rock CD that has the rock and roll flavor without people feeling that he is sending a religious message. He has incorporated some of the material into his current set list. "I just introduce it by saying, "Now here's a song from our first album." I don't say anything about it being Christian or non-Christian or that I have a message for you. I just play the song as it is and people will either yep or nay it depending on what they get out of it. We have been met with more than polite applause," said Lou. "I had wanted to record a Christian CD ever since 1992 when I first went to rehab and gave my life to the Lord. I'm not trying to get people to change. It's what I needed to do to make my life worth living. It was something I promised myself that I would do. I would take my God given talent and gifts and give back."

For more information about Lou Gramm including his tour schedule, please visit: www.lougramm.com Listen at www.myspace.com/lougrammofficial

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