

V NOW WE'RE TALKIN

By Helen Marketti

That's How Strong My Love Is: From Rock n Roll to James Dean

An interview with Author David Loehr

It's 1965, and David Loehr is 15 years old. He and some friends skipped school one April day from Pittsfield High School (Pittsfield, MA) and hopped on a Greyhound Bus headed to Albany, NY, to see the Rolling Stones in concert. It was David's first rock concert, a real one, and a stirring of life changing events had started. Months later, now 16 years old, he hopped a bus again headed for New York City to see the Stones, only this time he was alone and took on The Big Apple by himself. By the time he was 19, David had his own retail shop, designed ads for his merchandise, and started to promote and book bands. One opportunity led to another and he has stayed on this path for most, if not all, of his life.

Today, David and his partner Lenny own and curate the James Dean Gallery located in the small, country town of Fairmount, Indiana. As far as we know, David has the largest collection of James Dean memorabilia. Fans arrive daily from far and wide to admire and appreciate the collection, and spend the day where Hollywood actor James Dean was raised and laid to rest.

David's recent book, "That's How Strong My Love Is: From Rock n Roll to James Dean" (Steuben Press, 2021), details the story of where he started and where he is now. The book covers David's life from 1960 through 2015. The stories and photos are a mixture of fortunate and unfortunate events, as life dictates. Readers will appreciate the humble beginnings as he gets his footing to create the life he desires. Stories include his friendships with Andy Warhol and with Hollywood actor Jeremy Davies (Saving Private Ryan). The photos included are an assortment of scattered ephemera capturing events, places, and memories.

"I had a partial scholarship at Parsons School of Design (New York) and attended for one full year. I have always loved art, drawing, designing and creating," said David. "I have had many incredible experiences and felt that I had quite a story to tell."

One of those memorable stories concerns his friendship with Andy Warhol. "It was pretty special to know him," recalls David. "I had first met him at Max's in New York City. We just started talking and one day I decided to visit him at his studio which was called The Factory. I remember the actor Joe Dallesandro and film director Paul Morrissey were there

that day, too. We were sitting around and talking. It didn't occur to me at the time that it was a historical moment. I never thought to take a picture or ask for an autograph but then again they were my friends and normally you don't ask a friend for their autograph."

David's interest in James Dean began when he was given a copy of "James Dean: The Mutant King," written by David Dalton as a Christmas gift. David's friend hinted that he would see himself in the book. "I wasn't sure what he had meant by that at the time. I really didn't know anything about James Dean. I knew the name. I knew the face. That was it. When I read the book, I was definitely intrigued by the story. After I read the book, I watched James Dean's movies and it was life changing."

"James Dean and I had several similarities," said David. "His mom passed away when he was nine years old. My father passed away when I was nine years old. He went to live with his aunt and uncle. I went to live with my grandmother. We both grew up on a farm. After high school, he went to LA to do theatre. After high school, I went to New York to do theatre."

Over many years, David started accumulating many items of James Dean memorabilia. "I was a fan and wanted to get as many items as I could pertaining to James Dean. It wasn't until I moved from LA to New York that I became a serious collector."

Eventually, David traveled to Fairmount, Indiana, and made several visits to see where James Dean had lived and where he was laid to rest. It was during these visits that he met Adeline Nall, who was James Dean's drama teacher at Fairmount High School. The two became friends and kept in touch. David also became friends with Marcus Winslow, who is James Dean's younger cousin. Over time, David and Lenny moved to Fairmount where they have lived the last 35 years. The James Dean Gallery has been open to the public for

33 years. More than 400,000 fans have visited the gallery and that includes celebrities as well. The singer Meatloaf has visited, as have actors Martin Sheen and Jeremy Davies.

James Dean has been gone for 66 years! Why does he still appeal to fans? "He made three great films," said David. "Those films have lasted the test of time and show his talent. He appeals to people for different reasons. James Dean was a farm boy, a Hollywood actor, a race car driver, an artist, a bohemian. He was multifaceted and because he was that way, has made fans drawn to him. Plus, he had the movie star looks and died at 24, yet his legacy is forever."

David spent four years writing his book. "I had been thinking about writing a book for years. I would think about something that happened, jot it down on a piece of paper, and put the paper inside a shoebox. I always wrote things down because you may never think of it again. Eventually the shoebox was full of these notes. I kept journals, too. Then I started going through boxes of old photographs and the pictures would trigger more stories. Lenny and I bounced around ideas and memories. I started to arrange everything in chronological order, which served as the outline for my book. I wanted the images on the cover to include The Rolling Stones, David Bowie, and James Dean because they are mentioned

the most throughout the book. Plus, the cover creates great subject matter."

"The title of the book, 'That's How Strong My Love Is' was a song originally written and recorded by Otis Redding. Since I am a huge Rolling Stones fan, I liked their version of the song better. I think they made the song more popular. It's one of my favorite songs and seems to sum up everything," explains David. "All of the things that Lenny and I have been through, including our career paths, moving from LA to New York and then from New York to Fairmount and sharing all the ups and downs of our lives. We stayed strong and persevered. That's what I would like readers to come away with after reading my book, to persevere, follow your dreams, stick to your guns, do your best and keep on going. We've made a lot of people happy over the years. Lenny has designed clothing that has been worn by The Rolling Stones, David Bowie and actress Ann Margaret. I have put together shows and events that have been attended by thousands of people and then we put together the James Dean Gallery in James Dean's hometown. We love it here and are happy."

For information on "That's How Strong My Love Is: From Rock 'n Roll to James Dean," see:

www.jamesdeangallery.com



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