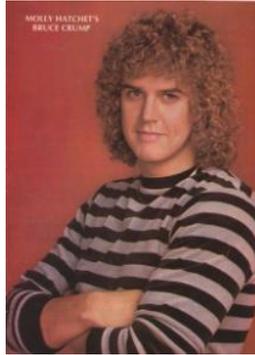




## BRUCE H. CRUMP, JR., SMA-75



(1958 – 2015)

Bruce Crump attended Staunton Military Academy (SMA) for the school year 1971-72 with the Class of 1975. He later graduated from high school in Jacksonville, FL.

“I was a senior in high school,” Crump told *Richmond Biz News* in 2013. “Somebody told me about Molly Hatchet, so I snuck out one night to see them. And then through some mutual friends I heard that their drummer was leaving, so I contacted one of the members to see if that was true, and he said, ‘Yeah, we pretty much don’t have a band.’”

Bruce became the drummer for the Molly Hatchet band in 1976 at the age of 18 and something clicked. By 1978, when Bruce was 20, Molly Hatchet was on tour promoting a platinum self-titled (*Molly Hatchet*) debut. The follow up, 1979’s *Flirtin’ with Disaster*, became a Top 20 smash, selling more than three million copies on the strength of its beloved title track. Then, *Beatin’ the Odds*, released in 1980, also went platinum. In 1981, however, *Take No Prisoners* barely cracked the Top 40, and Molly Hatchet’s hit-making days were over. Rock and roll was always in his blood, and he continued to carry on, playing with the same gusto he did when he joined the band that would go on to become world-famous.

Crump and his band members experienced the usual trials and tribulations of being rock stars — egos leading to members quitting, drug and alcohol excess — but almost all came back home. Crump split from [Molly Hatchet] in 1982 to seek more opportunities in California, then joined up with another rock outfit in Canada. But he came back in 1984 to rejoin Molly Hatchet and stayed with them until 1990, when the band decided to take a year off. What was supposed to be a year hiatus wound up being the end of Crump’s association with Molly Hatchet. Someone else bought the rights to the band and it continues, but with only one original member, founder Dave Hlubek, who sits in on only the occasional live show. [\* Excerpted from **A MODEST ROCK STAR** below]. In 2004, Crump memorably joined Molly Hatchet, still under Dave’s leadership, during a performance at Richmond, VA.

Later Crump, at 55, settled into Midlothian, VA, where he was a drummer in his church's praise choir and played with a few local bands. In 2013, he also started the band called Red Star Crush, which, like Molly Hatchet, also had three platinum albums. After stints in real estate and web design, Crump, pictured below, went into business teaching his craft to aspiring musicians, at \$30 per half-hour lesson and \$40 for an hour-long session.



(Photo by Burl Rolett)

[On June 24, 2013 Burl Rollett of] Richmond BizSense caught up with Crump at his home where he plays with two platinum records on the wall behind him. His teaching outfit – Drum Lessons by Bruce – was taking new students, and although the music business is drastically different from when he started out, Crump isn't ready to give it up quite yet. *Below is an edited transcript of the interview.*

**Richmond BizSense:** After 35 years of recording and touring as a professional musician, what sticks out in your mind from your career?

**Bruce Crump:** The Nuremburg, Germany, show with the Who was really a standout. That one's easy, because you don't really play for 150,000 people very often. It was a big open air thing in Germany. I heard they stopped counting at 150,000. Rumor has it that there were quite a few more.

**RBS:** How did you get your start in music?

**BC:** I grew up most of my life down in between Jacksonville and St. Augustine, Florida. And that's where I ran into the Molly Hatchet guys somewhere around late 1975. I was a senior in high school. A few months over that summer I worked any job I possibly could to buy a set of drums.

Somebody told me about Molly Hatchet, so I snuck out one night to see them. And then through some mutual friends I heard that their drummer was leaving, so I contacted one of the members to see if that was true, and he said, "Yeah, we pretty much don't have a band."

**RBS:** How did a band like Molly Hatchet make a name for themselves in the '70s and '80s?

**BC:** It all has to come together. That's why we were successful, I believe. We had this triple threat between management, record company and booking agency, and the three of them worked really well together to get enough money behind us to put us on the road and then the right agency to put us with the right bands to get us in front of the right number of people.

We'd play a club, a record company executive would fly in and listen to the band, and it would be a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down." At that time it was mostly "thumbs down." Then the most unfortunate thing happened. The Lynyrd Skynyrd plane went down. Looking back on that, it opened up a door for our

career, but at the same time – talk about the true definition of bittersweet in that some of our friends were no longer, the band was no longer, so obviously there was a void.

**RBS:** It's been about 20 years since Molly Hatchet broke up. How have you paid the bills in the meantime?

**BC:** Music has always been what has sustained me, financially. I did get into real estate briefly. Back in July of 2003 I got my real estate license. A month later, I was diagnosed with throat cancer, so that kind of derailed my whole real estate career, at least for a couple of years, because after the treatments from the throat cancer there were some side effects that I am actually still dealing with today.

Music is what I've done since I went straight out of high school. I've done some odds and ends along the way. My former brother-in-law is a web design genius. I worked with him for a while, found out that wasn't really for me. Between drum lessons and playing around in local bands, that pretty much sustains me.

**RBS:** How did Drum Lessons by Bruce come about?

**BC:** Someone came up to me after church one Sunday and said "I have a 12-year-old son who's just starting to play the drums. Someone told me about your musical history, about the Molly Hatchet thing." And she said, "Do you teach?" And I looked at her for a second and said, "As a matter of a fact, I do." Of course I'd never even considered it, but I knew that with 35-plus years of playing the drums I'd picked up something along the way that I could certainly pass on.

My first lesson was probably two years ago. And then it kind of snowballed from there, because once I got into it, I realized how much I really liked it. I'm up between eight to 10 students during the day Monday through Friday. I'd like to see what it would be like to get 14, something like that. If I did three a day, five days a week, that's 15, I think that would be really good.

**RBS:** With your musical ventures in town, do you ever see yourself recording again?

**BC:** I'm not ready to throw in the towel, so to speak. I have some friends down outside of Atlanta who have contacted me about putting a project together, and these are guys who come from other bands from that same era as Molly Hatchet.

**RBS:** It's been a few decades since Molly Hatchet broke through. How would you promote yourself differently with a new project?

**BC:** The Internet is a great tool with all the social networking that's out there. Facebook is huge. There's a music website, ReverbNation, where if you record a song you can upload it and promote it that way. iTunes is huge; they have certain guidelines that you have to qualify for to have your songs available. I'm not sure what those are, but I imagine it has a lot to do with the quality of the material and also who the band members are.

I think that's where this project that I'm talking about in Atlanta may have a little bit of an advantage, because we all have 35-plus years of experience in the music business. So it's not like we're a garage band trying to throw something out there on iTunes and hope somebody listens to it.

## **A MODEST ROCK STAR: THE WORLD MOURNS THE LOSS OF MOLLY HATCHET DRUMMER AND JACKSONVILLE MUSIC LEGEND**

Posted Monday, March 23, 2015 in *Folio Weekly* Newspaper by Derek Kinner

“It didn’t suck.”

That’s how original Molly Hatchet drummer Bruce Crump jokingly described playing in front of thousands and thousands of fans in a multitude of high-profile arenas in the U.S. and around the world at the height of the Jacksonville band’s fame in the late 1970s and 1980s.

But in the last decade, Crump didn’t consider himself a rock star, his widow, Kristin Crump, said in an interview last week.

“I was not married to a rock star,” Kristin says. “I was married to Bruce. He was just my husband; he was my best friend. He didn’t feel that way [a rock star] and, quite frankly, neither did I. It was history, his past, and that was it.”

What sucks is that Crump died unexpectedly early on March 16. He was 57.

He’d been fighting throat cancer since 2003, but despite the health issues and numerous associated medical procedures that took a toll on his physical health, he kept rocking on, even forming his own company to mentor up-and-coming drummers. Nothing stopped his love of playing drums with not one, but two local bands – White Rhino and China Sky.

Husband-and-wife music photographers and videographers, Trevor and Eileen Bild, shared the last time they saw their friend.

“Bruce came out from behind the drums — they were doing a sound check — right out to the edge of the stage, stuck his hand out to welcome me whole-heartedly, which he has always done,” Trevor Bild says. Bild says Crump was suffering from what seemed to be a terrible cold, but during a break told him that no matter how bad he felt, it all went away when he was sitting behind his drums.

“I looked at him and said ‘passion.’ He looked at me with fire in his eyes, pointed at me, and said ‘Yes, it’s passion,’” Trevor Bild says.

When Crump first saw that Eileen was there, he left her with one last memory she says she’ll never forget. “He smiled, perked up, then blew me a kiss,” Eileen Bild says.

What also didn’t suck, Crump told me in an interview last September, was his family life. He said he was very happily married, had six great kids — four of his and two of Kristin’s — and couldn’t ask for more.

[\*]

Crump eventually moved to Virginia, but returned to Northeast Florida last June (2014) to join China Sky and White Rhino. China Sky, with Crump on the drums, released a new CD in February that’s been globally well-received, members say.

Despite living in constant, agonizing pain since his cancer diagnosis and resulting surgeries and procedures, Crump rarely let on how he felt, friends and family say.

Richard Dappa Smith, bassist and original member of China Sky, said most people would have hung it up after going through so much. Not Crump. “Unlike what a lot of other people might

have done, he was involved in a successful recording project right up until the day he died,” Smith says. Crump had numerous surgeries and procedures to address cancer-related issues, including many in his last weeks of life, but still made his final show.

Kristin Crump first met her future husband in 1987 during a Molly Hatchet concert, when she was 20 and attending Michigan State. She said she was first struck by his looks. Crump, while a fearsome drummer, had also become somewhat of a teen idol, his mug plastered across the pages of several of the day’s hottest music mags.

“He was just standing there in jeans and a sweater. I said to a friend, ‘Oh my God, that guy is so good-looking,’” Kristin Crump says. Her friend took it upon himself and approached Crump to introduce her, asking him what he thought about her. She says Crump replied, “She’s lovely.” They talked for a short while and then he said he had to go help the band, which is when she realized he was the drummer.

Skip forward 23 years to 2010. Kristin never forgot Bruce Crump and a friend who was on Facebook looked him up. They found him; the friend asked online if Bruce remembered her. He said no, but asked Kristin to start her own Facebook page so they could chat. She did, and one thing led to another, including six-hour phone conversations.

“We were totally, completely in love with each other before we saw each other again,” she says. “He was the funniest person, and I am a funny person. We would laugh our asses off.”

When they did meet face-to-face, the deal was sealed. She moved from Houston into Crump’s Virginia home. The two married in July 2013.

Despite previous divorces, he was a loyal father.

“He was always there for us even when he wasn’t physically present in our life,” his oldest child, Jessica, 26, says.

His son, Bradley, 23, who had his father’s love of the drums at age 8, said his father was his biggest mentor.

“Our parents were divorced when we were very young, but he was always there for us,” Bradley says. “When I was about 13, he said things like, ‘holy shit.’ I was doing things he couldn’t do. But I still can’t play ‘Flirtin’ with Disaster’ like he did. I try, but just can’t get it down.”

Crump also had two other sons, half-siblings of Jessica and Bradley’s, Jaden, 13, and Kyle, 11.

News of Crump’s death reverberated around the world. The UK’s *Classic Rock Magazine* ran an obituary. A fan from Finland posted on The Original Molly Hatchet Group’s page (which is administrated by Tom Nitzsche, and formerly Crump, and has well over 7,000 members):

“Southern rock is popular in Finland. We mourn the loss of the hardest-rocking drummer in that genre, RIP Bruce Crump.”

Back home, original Molly Hatchet founder Dave Hlubek, upon hearing news of Crump’s death, said Crump was “a tremendous person and talent who will never truly be appreciated and that he is loved and will be deeply missed.”

Crump’s recent bandmates say they have always been in awe of his drive despite the physical adversities he faced.

One of his closest friends, guitarist and founder of White Rhino, Steve Wheeler, remembers Crump driving up from Naples the day of his last show, despite suffering all week from something family members thought might be the flu; a demonstration of his loyalty to his bandmates and the business.

“That’s the kind of guy he was,” Wheeler says. “He was a joy to play with. The band can suck, but still sounds great because the drummer is great.”

China Sky bassist Smith said Crump, though humble and unaccepting of the role of rock star, made an impact on many people’s lives. “He didn’t stop. This is the legacy he leaves to most everybody. Bruce left a huge impact on people in and out of the music world.”

Sources: *Molly Hatchet.com*, *UltimateClassicRock.com*, *Folio Weekly (Jacksonville, FL) March 23, 2015*, *RichmondBizSense.com* (article by Burl Rolett)  
Edits by Kelly McGavock, SMA-59

Editor’s Note: You can see and hear Bruce Crump perform via internet searches using “Bruce Crump,” “Molly Hatchet,” or “Red Star Crush.”