

JUDAS PRIEST guitarist Kenneth "K.K." Downing Retires

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Former JUDAS PRIEST guitarist Kenneth "K.K." Downing has posted the following message on his official web site:

"I would just like to say a big thank you for your support and kind words. It is most heart-warming for me to be the recipient of such graciousness and compassion from you all.

"For some of you that would seem to desire some more details as to why I have resigned from the band, I can only say that there is nothing more underlying than I have already put in my initial statement. I would like to reassure you that I am still here for you and I am still the same person with the same feelings and sentiments.

"I have been lucky enough to have had a great life and to have fulfilled many goals, one of the most significant being the friendships that I have made with you my fans. Many of you I have met and we have enjoyed some time together, some of you I have just had a beer with and with others I might only have shared a couple of laughs or simply signed my autograph.

"Nothing could ever have been more rewarding than to have experienced and enjoyed our special relationship and the things that we have shared together - those being music, friendship and the love of life itself."

Downing, whose retirement from the band was announced last month, issued a statement regarding his departure from the legendary heavy metal group on the eve of its farewell tour. Downing said, "It is with much regret that I will not be with you this summer. Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your concerns about my health. Please rest assured that I am OK. There has been an ongoing breakdown in (the) working relationship between myself, elements of the band, and the band's management for some time. Therefore I have decided to step down rather than to tour with negative sentiments as I feel that this would be a deception to you, our cherished fans. However, I would urge you to please support the PRIEST as I have no doubt that it will be a show not to be missed."

Singer Rob Halford told French magazine Rock Hard, "K.K. leaving was his own decision, for the reasons he made public on his web site. . . K.K. has his own life to live and we can't force him to do anything he doesn't want to do."

The band has recruited 31-year-old British guitarist Richie Faulkner to replace Downing on the tour, with Halford saying, "K.K. can never be replaced; he's unique, and we didn't want any kind of K.K. copycat. Richie Faulkner came to Glenn's [Tipton, guitar] house to jam, and Glenn simply told me he was absolutely brilliant."

Although PRIEST plans to stop touring after this run, the band will continue to record and intends to issue a new studio album in 2012.