

# The Meaning of an Education

Lifelong Learning and the Blues

by

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M.A. The University of British Columbia, 2002

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
(Curriculum Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
(Vancouver)

September 2010

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# Abstract

All knowledge is individually constructed and contextually situated. Plainly put, different things mean different things to different people, under different circumstances, in different places, and at different times. What then is the meaning of an education?

Pragmatic philosophy holds the meaning of something to be intrinsically associated with its functional purpose or effect.<sup>1</sup> It is what it does. Education is thus commonly viewed as a way of instructing children and young persons in preparation for their making informed career choices leading to positive and productive participation in mainstream society as responsible adults. Current definitions include the upgrading, retraining and re-certification of mature workers.

Long considered a pipeline to social and material prosperity, education is generally programmed to succeed. But no two learners are the same, and everyone's experience is unique. What about the less well served, the ones that don't fit in — the ones flushed out the system's *other* end? What meaning does education hold for them?

This exercise examines one such experience — my own.

*There is very little difference between one man and another,  
but what little there is . . . is very important.*

William James, 1897<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Consider what effects, that conceivably might have practical bearings, we conceive the object of your conception to have. Then your conception of these effects is the whole of your conception of the object” (Peirce, 1905, 5.438)

<sup>2</sup> American pragmatist philosopher William James (1842-1910). From *The Importance of Individuals*” (1897). Found in Bartlett's Familiar Quotations (1992, 546, 12)

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*Love to all*

# The Setup

## Introduction

People tend to self-identify with their chosen occupation or profession (Becker & Carper, 1956). While some drive trucks for a living, others cultivate the land, teach school, work in banks, advise on financial matters, etc. I'm a working musician, a guitarist by trade, with more than four decades of experience in the field. It's the only thing I've ever done for a living. As such, it's who I am.

Musicianship is a “deviant” mode of employment, historically fraught with uncertainty and peril. (Becker, 1963) And blues musicians represent an even further occupational subset — a tribe within a tribe, figuratively akin to itinerant peddlers and carnival folk, with a correspondingly oblique perspective on life.

Blues music is traditionally performed late at night, or in the wee hours, on the fringes of society, in commercial establishments licensed for the sale of alcoholic beverages. Typically accompanied by libidinous dancing, raunchy language, and general carousing, lengthy participation has been known to conjure forth a host of unwelcome *daemons* — like alcoholism, drug addiction, heart disease, mental illness, economic hardship, emotional distress, and domestic discord, etc. (Becker, 1963, 1982; Murray, 1976)

What combination of circumstances and events might prompt a rational young person to pursue occupational deviance? How might someone actually go about choosing the *other* side? What about me? Was I just simply favourably predisposed as a child, innocently attracted by its lurid sheen? Or, was I prodded in that direction. Like everyone, I attended school as a youngster. Might that have played a role?

Others in my graduating cohort<sup>3</sup> moved on to the standard variety of career pursuits, becoming tradesmen, craftsmen, contractors, salespersons, housewives, clerks, bankers, managers, journalists, bureaucrats, entrepreneurs, real estate agents, doctors, dentists, and lawyers, civil servants, police officers, and politicians, etc., etc.

Granted, one became a famous syndicated cartoonist,<sup>4</sup> and two went to prison for murdering some poor fellow in Stanley Park, but conversation at a recent class reunion<sup>5</sup> indicated that the rest went on to lead relatively normal lives, with most now approaching comfortable retirement.

I wasn't the only budding professional musicians in my class — there were two others (also male). But unlike me (self-taught with modest technical facility), they were conventionally trained, with years of conservatory instruction between them. Not surprisingly, one went on to teach theory and composition at community college, and another became organist and choirmaster at a prominent Vancouver tabernacle.

Me? I ran away and joined the circus.

In addition to being an occupational deviant, I am also an educational oddity — a sexagenarian apprentice in an area of academic inquiry known as Curriculum Studies. The word “curriculum” is commonly associated with the education of children and young adults in institutionalized group settings, with research primarily focussing on pedagogical practice, and the efficient delivery of skills and information.

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<sup>3</sup> Class of 1965, North Vancouver Senior Secondary School, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Johnson

<sup>5</sup> The 40th, in 2005.

But William Pinar posits its Latin root as *currere*, meaning to “run the course.” (Pinar *et al*, 2000) Education is thus conceived in more expansive terms — not simply as a customary rite of passage for young people, with emphasis on peak performance and punctual completion, but a lifelong journey, with inquiry focussing more on the expedition itself — the unfolding landscape, and the instructional nature of persons, places, and events encountered along the way.

Thus, we have the term *curriculum vitae*, a formal compendium of one’s educational and work-related achievements. We also have the similarly derived “careering” or “careening” — words paradoxically invoking the more dangerously unpredictable and out-of-control aspects of existence.

I put off going to college until age forty-six, then began attending with classmates barely older than my own children. The desks were small and the daily schedule tight, but despite the aching joints and monstrous migraines — I managed to score well. From there I transferred to a full-fledged university (UBC), and in lengthy due course received both B.A. and M.A. certification.

There’s a reason why education tends to occur when people are young — because later on it’s much more difficult. (Scheutze, 2001; Rubenson & Xu, 1997) Grown-up people in the world have grown-up problems and responsibilities — family, career, finances, illness, divorce, even death (ideally not one’s own).

Yes, the older you are the tougher it gets. (De Beauvoir, 1970) Society does tend to privilege younger people’s projects (Biggs, 1993; 1999), thus relatively few choose to embark later on in life, and fewer still prevail. And those who do, buffeted and bruised by their biographies, typically arrive on campus *avec des bagages*, like well-worn suitcases, bulging with opinions, attitudes, and beliefs.



Or so it was for me.

The “art-world” is a precarious place to make a living, dangerously unstable and prone to exploitation by predatory interests. (Becker, 1982) And older art-workers, typically ineligible for the kind of employment benefits normally available to members of the mainstream workforce such as retirement security and extended healthcare, are particularly vulnerable to calamity. (Woolley, 2005)

Having spent my entire working life in the music industry trenches, perennially on the brink of economic and existential oblivion — I cheerfully confess to having developed a bit of an “attitude” problem. Moreover, I’m a blues musician, and blues music — inspired by African Americans’ historic struggle to live with dignity in the face of oppressive social relations — is by nature resistant to authority. So, naturally, I arrived at university with a monumental chip on my shoulder, especially respecting mainstream society and its vaunted public institutions.

*Constructivist learning theory holds that new knowledge is figuratively built upon a foundation of previously built knowledge. (Davis et al, 2000) We are reminded, however, that not all learning is necessarily positive and good, and that bad habits, bad attitudes and other forms of wrong thinking are similarly fabricated. (Merriam et al, 1996)*

Doctoral students typically matriculate in their mid-thirties, and either go on to teach at university, engage in scientific research, or otherwise function in positions commensurate with their elite qualifications. But my situation is different. I’m only a few years away from mandatory retirement in most jurisdictions.

Consequently, there are no decent entry-level opportunities available to me, academic or otherwise. Plus, I’ve never had a real job; never worked 9:00 to 5:00, five days a week, with weekends off, sick-leave, holiday pay, extended

benefits, and other handy entitlements — like a steady paycheck.

*Call me irresponsible. Throw in unreliable too.*

Sammy Cahn, 1962<sup>6</sup>

All I've ever done for a living is play guitar and sing in bands. Having never toiled inside the box, my standard work-related resumé is thin — no formal certificate of training, no list of previous employers, no record of positions held, no performance evaluations leading to promotion, no evidence of incremental merit-based advancement. Hence, from a conventional human resources (HR) perspective . . . I'm unemployable.

Accordingly, for better or worse, I remain a working musician.

*The blues is a feeling, and the blues is what I do*

Lucky Peterson<sup>7</sup> (2003)

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpted song lyric, from “Call Me Irresponsible,” composed in 1962 by Jimmy van Heusen (music) and Sammy Cahn (lyrics).

<sup>7</sup> Buffalo, NY born bluesman Judge Kenneth Peterson (b. 1964)

## Inquiry Focus

The general purpose of education research is “to advance society’s understanding of educational processes and outcomes.” (AERJ, 2007) Mainstream curriculum inquiry remains focussed on day-to-day school-related matters, like institutional efficiency, professional development, and individual student performance.

But I am not a teacher. Nor at this late stage in life do I see myself becoming one. Rather, I’m a lifelong learner — a “non-traditional” student of curriculum. (Schuetze, 2001) What then does an education mean to me?

Accordingly, this study entertains four basic queries.

1. What role did K-12 education play in my decision to become a working musician?
2. How did I subsequently come to acquire the technical facility, the social dexterity, and the ontological assurance required to function effectively in such a role?
3. What role did occupational deviance play with respect to the nature and quality of my latter-day engagement with higher education.
4. What role does education continue to play in my ongoing life and career?

*There is, perhaps, no better way to study curriculum than to study ourselves.*

Clandinin & Connelly (1998, 31)

## Mode of Inquiry

The challenge here is to identify a research strategy which is equally respectful of both scholarly tradition and the blues. Inquiry is thus to be both qualitative and story-driven.

*Simple stories told by simple people, that's the genius of the blues.*

B.B. King (1996)

Qualitative research is an expansive designation, with various meanings across different academic fields. Broadly defined, it refers to “any kind of [inquiry] that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification.”<sup>8</sup> (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 17). Generally speaking, it focusses how individuals and groups view and understand the world, and how they construct meaning out of their experiences.

Qualitative research emerged during the early 20th century in reciprocal response to limitations imposed by the stifling hegemony of 19th century positivism. Progressive academics Wilhelm Dilthey (1883-1911), Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), and John Dewey (1850-1952) argued that the world of nature is not the same as the world of human society, and that the study of cultural symbols, rules, norms, and values necessarily calls for a different, more humanistic approach. (Outhwaite, 1999)

Similarly rooted in the 19th century, blues music drew its early inspiration from African Americans' historic struggle to live with dignity under the violently

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<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added.

oppressive social regime known as Jim Crow (1896-1964)<sup>9</sup> which, for much of the 20th century, though officially unsanctioned, remained dedicated to the perpetual subordination of blacks within mainstream (white) U.S. society, and particularly in the rural South. (Baraka, 1963; Pinar, 2002)

*My life had its beginnings in the midst of the most miserable, desolate and discouraging surroundings.<sup>10</sup>*

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

*[The blues] were a way of affirming the somebodiness of black folks, and preserving the worth of black humanity through ritual and drama.*

James H. Cone (1992, 69)

Qualitative research methods first appeared in departments of Anthropology and Sociology, then spread to related fields such as Women's Studies, Social Work, Cultural Studies, and Education, and eventually even the hard sciences like Medicine and Mathematics. (Greenhahlg, 1999; Burton, 1995).

Blues music developed concurrently with qualitative research, gaining widespread popularity in America during the 1920s, and similarly proliferating far beyond its original home territories. Indeed, today, more than a century removed from its genesis among impoverished agricultural workers in rural Mississippi, the blues are heard throughout the world, performed and enjoyed by men and women of broadly diverse circumstances and cultural heritage.

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<sup>9</sup> 1896 - Plessy v Ferguson, U.S. Supreme Court decision confirming the “separate but equal” doctrine of racial segregation. 1964 - U.S. Civil Rights Act.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpted from *Up From Slavery* (1900), found in *Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (Gates & McKay (1997, 490).

## Autoethnography

Blues songs are traditionally rendered in the first person, with lyrical content focussing on the writer/performer's day-to-day lived experiences. Autoethnography (a subset of qualitative inquiry) similarly seeks to examine human phenomena from the researcher's personal perspective. It differs from conventional ethnography (a positivist research method by which the detached observer uses participant observation and interviews in order to acquire an objective understanding of *another* culture) in that it is fundamentally autobiographical, focussing on the writer's own subjective experience rather than the beliefs and practices of *other* persons.

*Autoethnography is a postmodern construct . . . in which the realist conventions and objective observer position of standard ethnography have been called into question. (Reed-Dunahay, 1997, 2)*

While autoethnography does touch on the lives of others (since everyone exists in a social context) it does so in a more haphazard, less systematic way than conventional ethnography. The term is thus commonly contested, and often conflated with "personal narrative," "narrative inquiry," or "autobiography."

Practice varies considerably according to the relative emphasis placed upon the self (*auto*), the context (*ethnos*), and the kind of academic writing employed (*graphein*). Studies of this general nature nonetheless share "four common commitments," the first reflecting the belief that the world of human experience must be studied from the point of view of the historically and culturally situated individual. Secondly, investigators are "to persist in working outwards from their own biographies [towards] the worlds of experience that surround them." Third,

they “will continue to value and seek to produce works that speak clearly and powerfully about these worlds.” Fourth, these texts “will be committed not just to describing the world, but to changing it.” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 915)

### The Method of *Currere*

The “method of *currere*” is a discipline-specific mode of autoethnographic inquiry conceived in Curriculum Studies as a way for students to contextualize their past educational experiences, both historically and culturally, and engage in critical reflection with a view towards optimizing professional teaching practice. (Pinar, 1980; 1981; 1994) Accordingly, writer/researchers are encouraged to share their school-related stories so that others might critically reflect upon and take meaning from corresponding or contradictory patterns in their own biographies. (Pinar *et al*, 2000)

*Currere* is distinguished by four figurative “moments” — the regressive, progressive, analytical and synthetical. (Pinar, 1994) First, with benefit of hindsight, “One returns to the past, to capture it as it was.” (55). Then, turning about, one gazes forward in time, progressing toward a place beyond the present, while imagining a variety of “possible futures.” (Pinar, 2000, 520) “The future is then present in the same sense as the past is present.” (Pinar & Grumet, 1976, 58).

*‘Tis a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.<sup>11</sup>*

Lewis Carroll, 1865

The analytical moment of *currere* is held to occur when, from the lofty perspective of the future, with freshly minted foresight, one turns again to face the present, only to confront the ever-pending spectre of one’s own becoming. The

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<sup>11</sup> From *Alice in Wonderland* (1865)



synthetic phase occurs when, flush with insight, one contemplates re-engagement with a brand-new reality, sublimely “integrated in [all] its meaningfulness.” (Pinar, 2000, 521) *Currere* is thus conceived as a sort of “pilgrimage,” with self-knowledge being the object of reverence or desire. (Pinar, 1975, 400)

*Currere*-inspired narratives in education research tend to involve personal accounts of classroom experiences from the teacher’s inside perspective. Kainin (2002) refers to these as “work stories.” Some are chatty, upbeat, and inspiring. Others are more gritty, and down to earth, focusing on staff-room politics, gender conflict, problems related to career advancement, relations between veteran and new teachers, and grumblings about management’s infringement upon the school’s social order, and other aspects of professional pedagogical practice.

For example, Rishma Dunlop’s groundbreaking 1999 dissertation/novel Boundary Bay “investigates the nature of teachers’ lives in school and university settings, the nature of institutional education, societal issues affecting intellectual and creative life, the roles of the woman poet and teacher, the social structures and conventions of marriage and contemporary women, the conflicts and paradoxes of motherhood, the issues of teen suicide and homosexuality, and the transformative power of literature and artistic forms of seeing the world.” (abstract).

Norman Denzin (1996, 28) notes that, whereas female teachers’ stories are generally “less concerned with separation and struggle,” male narratives tend to be “more confrontational” and “obsessed with conflict.”

*I’m a man.*<sup>12</sup>

Bo Diddley, 1955

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<sup>12</sup>Song title, written by Elia McDaniel (aka: Bo Diddley) released on Chess Records in 1955.

### Arts-based Narrative Inquiry

Arts-based narrative inquiry is characterized by “the presence of certain aesthetic qualities or elements infusing a study’s conception, design, and execution. (Barone & Eisner, 1997, 73) Unlike traditional modes of scholarly writing, which strive to appear objective and impersonal, the arts-based academic text willingly bears the author’s stylistic signature.

*Art is the process by which raw experience is processed into aesthetic statement.*

Albert Murray (1976, v)

Arts-based inquiry, like blues music, is naturally performative. As such, it celebrates good storytelling, of which Barone and Eisner (1997) posit several key characteristics. The first involves creation of a “virtual reality,” the idea being to situate certain characters and events within a recognizable socio-historic context, thereby “bestowing a measure of verisimilitude” upon which the reader might base a credible “belief in the virtual world as an analogue to the real one.” (74)

Arts-based academic texts also typically feature an “expressive literary style,” with figurative language employed to promote “intersubjectivity,” or “empathetic understanding” — referring both to an author’s ability to convey his particular perspective in an effective and accessible manner, and the ability of readers to reconstruct the author’s perspective within themselves.

The artful use of expressive language “allows re-creation of the mental atmosphere, thoughts, feelings, and motivations of the characters in a story, drama, or essay.” The inquiring reader is thus encouraged to “create additional material by further imaginative act” and to “vicariously experience events from a

different [other] perspective.” (77)

Highlighting the utility of ambiguity, Iser (1974, 58) celebrates “the unwritten part of the text” that encourages readers to fill in “narrative gaps” by drawing upon meanings gleaned from their own personal experience. Bakhtin (1981) further distinguishes between the kind of narratives that invite reader participation and those intent on rendering the final verdict, effectively muzzling *other* voices, and shutting down interpretive options.

### Bildungsroman

A *bildungsroman* is a particular type of personal narrative which focuses on the psychological and moral growth of a protagonist (typically male) from youth to adulthood and often beyond. Dating to the German Enlightenment<sup>13</sup> (1637-1789), it tells about the growing up or coming of age of a sensitive person in search of experience and edification, like an orphan or youngest son venturing forth into the world to seek his fortune.

*It can be conceded that there is no more exemplary protagonist than one who, whether he succeeds or fails otherwise, achieves a successful integration as a human being while engaged in action to promote the general welfare.*

Albert Murray, The Hero and the Blues (1973, 18)

Stories of this sort usually begin with an emotional upheaval prompting the hero to embark upon his odyssey. The goal is maturation, and the process is predictably long, strenuous, and gradual — typically involving repeated clashes between the hero’s needs and desires, and the views and judgments of an unbending social

<sup>13</sup> Measured from the 1637 preface of Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, to the 1789 French Revolution.

order. A list of familiar English language *bildungsroman* includes James Joyce's 1916 Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, and J.D. Salinger's 1951 Catcher in the Rye. The African American canon is particularly well-represented, notably by Richard Wright's 1958 The Long Dream and Ralph Ellison's 1952 Invisible Man.

### Validity and Truth

Like Homer's heroic *bildungsroman*, the following arts-based autoethnographic narrative represents my own true-life educational odyssey. The quantitative-objectivist criticism of storytelling as a legitimate research method draws upon traditional empiricist notions of validity and truth which hold it to be hopelessly relativist and fatally biased, offering only naive, sentimental, romantic or otherwise untruthful representations of reality, with no scientific value in fact, except perhaps as a form of confessional therapy.

But champions of autobiographical inquiry counter with criticism of their own, dismissing objectivity as an unachievable illusion, and condemning habitual, lockstep adherence to established scientific practices. How then are we to differentiate between truth and trash, when the tactics employed in arts-based auto-biographical narrative research are largely idiosyncratic, opportunistic, and unique to the investigator?

Dating to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, the correspondence theory of truth holds that something makes ideal sense if it corresponds to objective reality, and false if it does not. Relativism, however, argues that (a) cognitive bias prevents one from observing something objectively with one's senses, (b) that notational bias problematizes that which is measured without using ones senses, and (c) that culture bias further precludes any possibility of impartiality.

A “coherence theory of truth” rather sees the veracity of a proposition resting in its consistency with a specified set of rationally organized ideas. That is, in order to best “make sense,” a narrative must comprise a logically constructed, orderly, and consistently related sequence of literary elements. (Cornelius, 1962)

Narrative coherence is thus seen to embody:

1. Structural coherence: Do the parts of the story “hang together?”
2. Content coherence: Does the story “hold up” in comparison to other examples of its type or genre?
3. Character coherence: Are the characters “believable?” Do their relationships “play out?” Is the dialogue “realistic?” (Ibid.)

A “social consensus” theory of truth, on the other hand, holds (a) that the value of any proposition lies in its designation as meaningful by a social group, (b) that relations between a proposition and its truthfulness are an ongoing process of negotiation, and (c) that truth is situated, local, contingent, embodied, vague and open. (Goguen, 1997)

### The Ethics of Anonymity

Miles and Huberman (1994) highlight several key things to consider when engaging in autobiographical research:

1. Informed consent — Have the real-life characters in ones story been told of their inclusion? Do they need to be?
2. Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity — Might identifying characteristics of certain characters require masking?

3. Honesty and trust — Is the author being truthful in presenting data?  
Can fictionalized data represent a form of truth?

Respecting the protection of privacy and confidentiality in this instance — certain characters' names have been altered where required, using various criteria, on a situation specific basis. Simply stated, some have been changed, others have not. .

### Conclusion

The truthfulness of this particular arts-based auto-ethnographic narrative (or any other) is ultimately related to the terms of accountability that are attached to it (see above) and “its acceptance by a competent, critical community.” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, 85)

*Blues is truth . . .*

Brownie McGhee,<sup>14</sup> 1996

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<sup>14</sup> Tennessee-born Walter Brown "Brownie" McGhee (1915-1996). Noted piedmont-style bluesman, known for his lengthy collaboration with harmonica-player Sonny Terry. Song title and name of McGhee's posthumously established, San Francisco-based Blues Is Truth Foundation.

## Mode of Analysis

*A commodity [may] appear at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.*

Karl Marx (attr.)

Analysis, by definition, involves separating something into its various constituent parts or elements for careful examination, so that one might identify and more accurately appraise key factors, causes, and results, etc. Thus, it would seem to naturally embody a numerative component. Education, for example, is seen to comprise equal parts (1) learning (2) teaching, and (3) knowledge.

Music is similarly numerative by nature. The blues, for instance, in addition to being lyrically rendered in the 1st-person, typically proceeds in 2/4, 4/4, or 6/8 (3/4) rhythm, through 4, 8, 12, or 16 bar passages. Accordingly, the following story seems to invite a “by-the-numbers” approach to interpretation.<sup>15</sup>

One connotes a “whole-istic” way of looking at things. Education is thus apprehended in its entirety, not just as a series of individual episodes involving instrumental instruction or practical training, but rather as a contiguous, ongoing, lifelong affair.

*All are but parts of one stupendous whole*

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

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<sup>15</sup> The absent numbers 5 and 7 are herein deemed cogent to “jazz” but not “blues.”

But it takes two to tango. A simple analytical instrument of ancient Greek origin (revived in modern times by Imanuel Kant,<sup>16</sup> Johann Fichte,<sup>17</sup> George W. F. Hegel,<sup>18</sup> and Karl Marx<sup>19</sup>) — the dialectic is a handy double-edged tool for unearthing phenomenological situations and separating them into their constituent ontological opposites for critical observation.

For instance, a primary contradiction in the following story pits education versus occupational practice. Another contrasts teaching and learning. Other dyads at play include self/other, formal/non-formal, male/female, past/present, young/old, art and commerce, sacred/profane, healthy/sick, rich/poor, here/there, us/them, rural/urban, traditional/contemporary, mainstream/alternative, synchronic and diachronic, etc, etc.

*The opposite is beneficial; from things that differ comes the fairest attunement; all things are born through strife.<sup>20</sup>*

Heraclitus (540-480 BCE)

## Education

The following story similarly distinguishes three kinds of education. Formal education tends to privilege hierarchically structured, organized classroom instruction, which in turn normally foregrounds conventional transmissive teaching methods. Informal education refers to formally organized instruction which takes place outside the school or classroom such as art galleries, museums, rehearsal halls, and corporate offices, etc. The informal designation is often extended to include structured workplace situations, such as in traditional

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<sup>16</sup> 1724-1804

<sup>17</sup> 1762-1814

<sup>18</sup> 1770-1831

<sup>19</sup> 1818-1883

<sup>20</sup> From *On the Universe*, translation by W.H.S. Jones (1923)



apprenticeship and corporate training. (LaBelle, 1982)

Non-formal education, however, take place entirely outside the classroom, and focusses on the instructional properties of non-structured social and occupational interactions. As such, it is by nature incidental, spontaneous, and even unintended.

University is a highly formalized affair, characterized by scheduled lectures, text books, exams, and ritualized advancement protocols. Though similarly rich in tradition, ritual, and regalia — blues practice is quite the opposite. Each, however, is educative in its own way.

*All individuals are engaged in learning experiences at all times.<sup>21</sup>*

Thomas J. La Belle (1982, abstract)

## Learning

This study acknowledges three kinds of learning. Instrumental learning essentially means learning how to “do” something — like reading and writing, solving math problems, driving a car, or playing a musical instrument. Communicative learning involves individuals developing ways to express their feelings, needs, and desires.

Transformative learning takes place when, through critical reflection, long held predispositions, beliefs and judgments are altered, refined or otherwise elaborated upon to effect positive changes in attitude or perspective. As such, it involves learning how to “be.” (Davis & Sumara, 2000; Mezirow, 1991; 1997)

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<sup>21</sup> Emphasis mine.

## Knowledge

The following story highlights four different kinds of knowledge. (Lave & Wenger, 1991) Knowledge gleaned by description is conceptually inferred, expressed, implied, represented, or otherwise depicted using symbols (as in spoken and written language). Knowledge based on authority relies upon the status or reputation of the individual from whom it is handed down. Knowledge gleaned by acquaintance is immediate and physical, demonstrated and performed rather than merely described. Knowledge by participation is that which enables an organism to successfully negotiate the processes and structures that hazard its immediate environment. As such, it is adaptive, evolutionary, and naturally mimetic.

## Teaching

Six perspectives on teaching are similarly entertained. The term “perspective” is taken here to mean “a way of looking” at teaching, not an inventory of pedagogical methods and procedures. Transmission (a hallmark of formal, institution-based education) is seen to bear two defining characteristics — the primacy of the teacher-to-content relationship, and the efficient delivery of curriculum. (Boldt, 1998) A developmental approach is less focussed on authority and the commodification of knowledge, rather seeking “to clarify how the human mind comes to understand something, and the nature of the relationship between learning and teaching.” Developmental teaching is thus viewed more in terms of “cultivation,” with knowledge figuratively “planted” in the individual learner’s fertile mind for later gathering. (Arseneau & Rodenberg, 1998)

A nurturing perspective is more learner-centred still, and sees the teacher’s role as facilitating self-efficacy. A nurturing evaluation of learning is more concerned

with competence levels than relative performance, rather seeking a “consensual validation of experience.” “Do no harm” is a fundamental tenet. (T’Kenye, 1998)

Social reform denotes a “radical” approach to teaching predicated on the assumption that Education<sup>22</sup> is “naturally biased towards the interests of those in possession of social, political, and economic power.” (Apple, 1979) Radical pedagogy thus seeks to empower learners with a view to their becoming “socially active, critically thoughtful, and educated, responsible, and cooperative citizens.” (Nesbit, 1998)

Apprenticeship is a traditional mode of workplace education centred around the activities of a master worker, or group of masters in an organized community of occupational practice. (Johnson & Pratt, 1998) Non-hierarchical peer mentoring (or “lateral” mentoring) is an alternative mode of workplace education typical of loosely constituted, “participative” communities of practice. (Ellinger, 2002)

### Multiple Intelligences

Gardner (1999) posits eight different kinds of intelligence: the verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spacial, body-kinesthetic, auditory-musical, inter-personally communicative, intra-personally communicative, and existential.

*It's not how smart you are that matters, it's how you are smart.*

Howard Gardner (Attr.)

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<sup>22</sup> Upper case intended to represent “the education industry.”

## Stages of Life

This study is fundamentally interested in lifelong learning. (Rubenson, 2003; Schuetze, 2001) Erikson (1959, 1982) sees life unfolding in eight successive stages, with the quality of progress through each in part determined by our success (or lack of success) in all the previous stages. The first stage concerns an infant's basic needs being met by its parents, the key task being to develop trust without completely eliminating the capacity for rational mistrust. The second stage occurs in early childhood (from about eighteen months to three or four years old) with parents providing a secure home-base from which the child can venture forth into the world and assert its will. The task here is to achieve a healthy degree of autonomy while minimizing shame and doubt.

Stage three (ages 3-6) is the "genital" or "play" stage, the challenge being to develop "initiative" without accumulating too much collateral "guilt." Stage four (6-12), is where children learn to acquire the instrumental and social skills that society will later demand of them. Stage five comprises adolescence (beginning with puberty and ending around eighteen). Success here essentially involves learning who you are and how you fit into society. Stage Six comprises young adulthood (18-30) and generally involves achieving some degree of personal intimacy (as opposed to living in social isolation). Stage seven denotes middle adulthood (25-55), and includes the period during which we are most likely involved with raising children. Stage eight comprises late-adulthood and begins around age sixty. The task here is to develop and maintain a healthy measure of ego integrity (wisdom) into one's dotage while minimizing the potential for desperation and despair.

## Conclusion

The following arts-based autoethnographic *bildungsroman* invites interpretation using the eight “heuristic instruments” introduced above — the dialectic, three sorts of education, three kinds of learning, four types of knowledge; six perspectives on teaching, eight kinds of intelligence, and eight stages of life — the idea being to emulate the employment of “musical instruments” in a meaning-filled performance of the blues.

The preceding metaphor linking research methodology and music practice is further explicated in a concluding section entitled Interpretation & Analysis (p239).

*It is well that we examine the meaning of the blues while they are still falling upon us.*

Richard Wright, 1959 (in Oliver, 1960, xvii)

# The Story

## First Class

*Memory is not just the past. It is the water you swim through, the words you speak, your gestures, your expectations.*

John Ralston Saul (2001, 213)

The Arsenal Football Club was founded in 1886 by workers at the government armaments depot in the South London (UK) borough of Woolwich. My maternal great-grandfather, Albert Bennett (a mortician by trade), was an ardent supporter. Woolwich in those days was a poor working class area. Nevertheless, despite struggling financially in the amateur ranks of the English Football Association (founded in 1863), the “Gunners” remained perennially competitive .

Requiring increased revenues to turn professional, they moved to newer and more substantial facilities across the River Thames in the burgeoning North London district of Holloway. Ever the dutiful fan, Albert followed his beloved team, eventually settling down in nearby Highbury to marry and raise a family. The problem was, he didn’t tell his wife and kids back home in Woolwich.

That’s right, Great-grandad was a bigamist.

*Did you ever have to make up your mind?  
Say yes to one and leave the other behind?*<sup>23</sup>

John Sebastian, 1966<sup>24</sup>

His son, my maternal grandfather, also named Albert, was by all reports an exemplary parent. A genial redhead, affectionately known as Ginger, he fought

<sup>23</sup> Excerpted song lyric, from “Did You Ever Have to Make up Your Mind,” recorded in 1966 on Kama Sutra Records by the Lovin’ Spoonful.

<sup>24</sup> New York-born John Benson Sebastian Jr. (b. 1944), American singer/songwriter, leader of the band Lovin’ Spoonful.

in France during WW1. A bus driver by occupation, he was an amateur paralegal by calling, his freely rendered counsel being highly valued within the closely knit North London community.

My mother Eleanor (1921-2008) was the middle of nine children, all Highbury-born and raised. Consistent with the times, Mum's education concluded at age sixteen, at a level roughly equivalent to Canada's Gr.10. A stylish city girl, known to friends and relatives as Nellie, she was a naturally gifted seamstress and women's clothing designer. During WWII, alongside many other young British females of her generation, she served in the Women's Auxiliary Airforce (WAAF) providing home-guard logistical and administrative support.

Great-grandad on my father's side was a Scottish soldier, likely from Glasgow, named "Jock" Mitchell.<sup>25</sup> A non-commissioned officer stationed in the English Channel port of Dover, Kent, he is said to have stood 6'5" tall — a veritable giant in those days (c.1900). He is similarly believed to have had red hair.

Though spared the stain of bigamy, Jock was nonetheless a cad. It seems that, shortly following his regiment's return from WW1, he disappeared — callously abandoning his wife and three young daughters to abject poverty. For years I presumed the very worst, thinking that he must have been of highly dubious moral character. But now, as a grandfather myself, looking back at the 1914-1918 conflict, it's possible that he'd simply seen too much senseless killing, and just wandered away, another post-traumatic casualty of war.

Born in Dover in 1921, my father Denis Mitchell was the product of an illicit liaison between Jock's sixteen year-old daughter Laurel and a randy Irish Fusilier

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<sup>25</sup> A common generic English nickname for Scotsmen named John.



named Patrick Ward. Sadly consistent with family tradition, this Paddy<sup>26</sup> also shirked his parental responsibilities. Following the establishment of an independent Irish Republic in 1921, he mustered back to Armagh<sup>27</sup> with his regiment, leaving my pregnant teen-age grandmother to fend for herself.

Yes, it's true, Daddy was a bastard!

Being born out-of-wedlock isn't such a big deal these days, but in post-Edwardian provincial England it was a major social stigma. And, being both misbegotten and lowborn, despite being more than intelligent enough to succeed academically, opportunities for his educational advancement were few.

Frequently the target of narrow-minded scorn, young Denis had to work everyday collecting bottles and delivering papers to help support his despairing mother. When offered a modest scholarship to a respectable Church of England school, his mother Laurel declined.

“They're not our people Sonny,” she said, anticipating the ridicule he'd most certainly face. “It would only bring more pain.”

Then came WWII.

From my comfy 21st century, west-coast Canadian perspective, it's hard to imagine what it must have been like for a nineteen year-old British infantryman in 1940, stranded on the beach at Dunkerque, being strafed by Stuka dive-bombers, and pummeled by German artillery, day in and day out for weeks on end, only to be miraculously whisked away to safety across the Channel by a hastily assembled

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<sup>26</sup> A common generic English nickname for Irishmen named Patrick.

<sup>27</sup> Site of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers HQ depot.

flotilla of “little ships.”<sup>28</sup>

Lost among the more than 300,000 other evacuees in desperate retreat, rather than report directly to battalion HQ upon repatriation to the channel port of Ramsgate, he instead walked the ten miles west along the coast to Dover, for three day’s rest and relaxation at his grandmother’s house.

“With so much confusion . . . they didn’t notice I was gone.”

A signalsman, never rising above the rank of corporal, he later served in North Africa, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), and Singapore. But that’s all I know about “Daddy’s war.” He never talked about it.

My parents met at a swing dance in London shortly after the war — she the urban working-class princess, he the provincial pauper-prince. I was born on 28 May 1949, in the Burnt Oak Annex of Edgware General Hospital, and taken home to a mock-Tudor rental in North Wembley.

I remember the boy next door, a bit older than me, with an extensive collection of tin soldiers, each painted in English regimental finery and meticulously laid out on the dining room table in a historically correct reenactment of Henry V’s 1413 triumph over the French at Agincourt (I suspect his father held more than a fleeting interest in British military tradition).

On the other side lived my twelve year-old baby-sitter Wendy, a winsome English lass, with alabaster skin, a cheeky smile, and a carefree tousle of auburn hair.

Desperately in love — my pet name for her was “Wo Wo.”

<sup>28</sup> The “little ships” were the approximately 700 private vessels that sailed from Ramsgate in England to Dunkerque in France between May 26 and June 4, 1940 as part of Operation Dynamo, the rescue of more than 338,000 British and French soldiers, who were trapped on the beaches at Dunkerque during the Second World War.

Across the road, with his wife and two young daughters, lived locally famous London band leader Sid Phillips. The Phillips girls, aged eight and six, were horrible, constantly scheming up new ways to terrorize the neighbours' toddler, even once (to their giggling delight) inducing me to bite into a bar of laundry soap while blindfolded. Sugar and spice my ass! They weren't very nice at all.

My parents, however, seemed to enjoy the idea of having a celebrity living across the street, especially Mum, who boasted to her Cockney brothers and sisters.

“He was on at the Palladium! A command performance! For Princess Margaret!”

In 1953, my folks bought a brand-new, semi-detached<sup>29</sup> three-bedroom house at 108 Shaftesbury Avenue in the newly developed Middlesex suburb of South Kenton. Construction of this sort, designed to stimulate a still-struggling postwar economy, stood as a symbol of Britain's phoenix-like rise from the ashes of the Blitz.<sup>30</sup>

Down the road, tucked in beside Woodcock Park, stood a cluster of hastily erected “prefabs,”<sup>31</sup> built to house inner-city families who'd been bombed-out during the war. Their relocation to the suburbs was supposed to have been short-lived, but seven years later — they were still there.

A spirit of collective wartime sacrifice still prevailed throughout the land, and working-class children were as a rule admonished to not look down on the poor and less fortunate. Indeed, my mum's working-class family was also from central London, and my Dad's provincial background was distinctly unimpressive. But,

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<sup>29</sup> The British term for “duplex.”

<sup>30</sup> The Blitz was the sustained bombing of Britain by Nazi Germany during WWII (particularly between 7 September 1940 and 10 May 1941). By the end of May 1941, over 43,000 civilians (half of them in London), had been killed, with more than a million houses destroyed or damaged.

<sup>31</sup> Temporary “prefabricated” homes.

compared to these folks — we seemed downright upper-crust.

Their kids were scruffy, even dirty, and wore ill-fitting, homemade clothes, with hobnailed leather boots, and swore like sailors — with heavy, slang-laden Cockney accents.

The neighbours didn't like them much at all, figuring them no better than Gypsies.

*Gypsies (also known as Travelers) have lived in Britain and the London area for approximately 500 years. The name 'gypsy' is derived from the word 'Egyptian', as it was once believed that that was where they came from.*

*Historians and linguists agree that the original Gypsies were a group of nomadic people known as Romani who left India around a thousand years ago, gradually migrating across the Middle East and Europe before eventually arriving in Britain. Today's British Gypsies are descendants of these migrants. Ethnic Romani continued to arrive from central and eastern Europe during the 20th century, many fleeing the Nazis, others following the fall of communism.*

*Gypsies in Britain have long been persecuted for pursuing a nomadic lifestyle, but many now do live in houses, especially around Kent and the South East near Dover, where historically they have traveled in large numbers. Gypsy communities have their own unique culture, language and traditions, typically focussed around close-knit family groups. Traditionally disadvantaged with respect to accommodation and the delivery of health and education services, they consequently endure high rates of sickness and illiteracy. Gypsies and Travelers are generally not counted in the national census. (Merriman, 1993)*

But they weren't really Gypsies — were they? Prefab pal Clive and his brother Derek seemed really nice. Their mum once had me over for beans on toast. And

their dad taught me how to play draughts.<sup>32</sup>

But I couldn't help overhear the grownup neighbours murmuring on about their foul language, poor hygiene, and alleged propensity for petty crime. Thus, I was persuaded to forego further close engagement, even though it did seem terribly wrong.

At age five, I was enrolled at Mount Stewart Primary, essentially a kindergarten, but run just like an elementary school by Mrs. Evans, the stern but motherly Head Mistress. I still recall my first day, sitting cross-legged on the assembly hall floor, gazing purposefully upwards at the large Roman letters posted on the wall . . . Aa . . . Bb . . . Cc . . . Dd . . . Ee . . . Ff . . . etc.

“Oh boy!” I bubbled to myself. “Soon I'll be able to read and write! And then I'll learn all my times tables. And then . . . and then . . .”

Sure enough, within a year, I could do all my sums (add, subtract, multiply, and divide) plus read and write in cursive longhand. We learned about our English forebears: Beowulf and Boadicea, the Romans, Vikings, Anglo-Saxons, and Norman French. And our class field-trips were outstanding — the Tower of London, Greenwich Observatory, the British Museum, and Kew Gardens. All in all, it was terrific fun. One annoying memory, however, still remains.

“We're going to organize a choir,” said Teacher. “Auditions begin tomorrow.”

Curiously (especially considering my subsequent career as a musician), I was not selected.

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<sup>32</sup> Checkers.

“We’re just little kids for Christ’s sake!” I said (only to myself, of course). “What do you mean I’m not good enough?! My singing isn’t any worse than theirs! Screw you!”

North London’s suburban landscape was blandly homogenous. For instance, there were only two cars on our street — a nondescript gunmetal gray Vauxhall Velox *sedan* parked up one end, and a tan Hillman Mynx *coupé* down the other. With no need for a driveway and garage, each identical semi-detached house sported a neatly manicured front garden, protected by a two foot high brick fence (topiary optional).

And everyone was white, with most belonging to the Church of England (C of E). Sure, there was a Jewish family living across the street (the Golds), and the O’Driscolls down the way (Irish and Roman Catholic), but the general feeling in that part of Britain, having endured the war, was one of tribal unity.

Despite our differences, we were, above all — Londoners!

*Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner,  
That I love London so.  
Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner  
That I think of her . . . wherever I go.<sup>33</sup>*

English children in the early 1950s didn’t think much about racial prejudice and intolerance. Indeed, there weren’t any coloured people around to prejudge and tolerate. So we just blithely gorged away on Golliwog bubblegum, Golliwog jams and marmalade, and Black Sambo licorice candy.

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<sup>33</sup> Excerpted song lyric, from “Maybe It’s Because I’m a Londoner,” written in 1944 by Islington-born Hubert Gregg (1914-2004), first performed on the theatre stage by Bud Flanagan, later recorded by the Billy Cotton Band.

*The Golliwog is a character of children's literature created in the late 19th century by Florence Kate Upton, inspired by a blackface minstrel doll which she'd apparently found in her aunt's attic. Pilgrim (2000) describes Golliwog as usually male, with very dark skin, big red lips, white rimmed eyes, wearing a bow tie and trouser suit. Appropriated by commercial toy-makers, the Golliwog character enjoyed widespread popularity, particularly in Great Britain and the English-speaking Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) with manufacture and retail distribution continuing well into the 1960s.*

*The Golliwog brand/image has lately become the subject of heated debate. Those in favour argue that it should be preserved and passed on as a cherished cultural artifact and childhood tradition. Opponents, however, insist it should be retired as a relic of an earlier more racist epoch, when ridicule and discrimination towards persons of African descent was deemed acceptable. (Henry-Waring, 2007)*

On my 5th birthday, consistent with Bennett family tradition, I received an Arsenal football uniform, hand-sewn by my Highbury-born mother in the official team colours of red, white and black. In further ritual accord, I was taken to see a Saturday afternoon game against East London rivals West Ham United.

It was a strictly male affair — myself, my father, and three Cockney uncles. The stadium was too far away to walk, so instead we took the Tube. Entering the Underground at Caledonian Road Station, we rode the crowded escalator down to platform level, where too many people were trying to cram themselves into not enough carriages. Several overstuffed express trains sped by without stopping. So, with kickoff time looming, the uncles finally put their streetwise heads together and jammed us all onboard an outbound car.

The trip was short, one stop only, but unnerving nonetheless. With our stadium destination rapidly approaching, the tightly packed passengers, in overeager anticipation of arrival, surged towards the unopened sliding doors. The

locomotive ground to a full stop, and the boisterous partisan crowd burst forward like a swollen river, carrying with it my father and three uncles. I was only five years-old, barely knee-high to the average grown-up. Startled by the intensity of the crush, I lost grip of my father's hand, and got tangled underfoot. The platform clock was ticking, and time was running out, but there I was — still stuck in the back, behind the slowest of the slow, crawling between people's legs, pushing as hard as I could.

The superintendent blew his warning whistle. "All clear!" he barked for everyone to hear.

With half of me outside, and the other half still in — the carriage doors slid shut, catching my innocent forearm in their sinister grip. Then suddenly, the train began to move again, dragging me down the platform as it accelerated towards the ominous black tunnel looming at the far end. With tension rising and uncles Gordie, Bill, and Doug desperately running alongside trying to pry the doors apart, my father finally managed to grab my flailing hand and pull me free.

Yikes!

I don't remember much about the football match itself, other than it was anticlimactic. We stopped in to a Gunner pub on the way home, so the men could calm their nerves (and get their stories straight, lest my mother inquire). Children were welcome to accompany their parents in English pubs back then (as now), and many licensed establishments had gardens in the back precisely for that purpose. A few pints of bitter later and their conversation turned louder and more determined. I'm not sure exactly what the topic of discussion was — something about "immigration," "unemployment," and "those bloody Wogs."



“Uncle Doug,” I innocently ventured. “What’s a Wog?”

“Well Linny,” he replied, not wishing to appear irredeemably prejudiced. “A Wog is a wily oriental gentleman.”

In 1953, like many other English families interested in viewing the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, we got a television set. But with only one BBC channel on offer, service was, by North American standards, painfully restricted. Daily broadcasting started at 3:00pm with an hour of programs aimed at infants and very young children — like *Mick and Montmorency* (featuring diminutive music-hall comedian Charlie Drake) and *Bill and Ben the Flowerpot Men*. The American-made half-hour TV westerns came on next — *Roy Rogers*, *Hopalong Cassidy*, *Wild Bill Hickock*, *The Lone Ranger*, and my personal favourite — *The Cisco Kid*, starring Duncan Renaldo and his avuncular sidekick Pancho (actor Leo Carillo) *The Legend of Robin Hood* starring Richard Green, and *Long John Silver* featuring crusty British stage veteran Robert Newton provided a balance of U.K. domestic content.

Next to football (soccer), the game to play at school was “cowboys and Indians.” Most kids wanted to be the cowboy, probably because they always won. But I was rather more inclined to play the Indian — the brave underdog, with brightly coloured eagle feathers, fringed buckskin tunics, scary war paint, and “heap big medicine.” And compared to the average cowpoke’s dowdy family-sedan mode of equine transport, the Indians’ sporty pinto pony looked like an exotic racing car.

BBC prime-time was for adults only, and featured the more adult-oriented hour-long westerns, like *Wyatt Earp* (starring Hugh O’Brian) and *Gun Law* (a rebranded British version of *Gunsmoke* starring James Arness). My parents would

occasionally let me stay up late (7:00pm) to watch Cockney quiz-master Wilfred Pickles hosting *Have a Go*. And on Saturdays before bedtime we'd tune in *en famille* for *Live at the London Palladium*, Britain's equivalent to *The Ed Sullivan Show*. The weekly highlight, however, was *The Goon Show* — starring comedians Spike Milligan and Peter Sellers, and operatic-tenor Harry Secombe.

Radio programming in Britain during the early 1950s (similarly monopolized by the BBC) was decidedly middle-of-the-road. While its flagship channel remained dedicated to “quality entertainment,” with emphasis on highbrow classical music and political commentary, the Light Program (introduced in 1945) offered more accessible fare. I well remember being five or six years-old, sitting alone for hours and hours in front of the fireplace, listening to *The Archers* (a soap-opera style drama) and tapping along to syrupy Mantovani<sup>34</sup> versions of “The Swedish Rhapsody,”<sup>35</sup> “The Skater’s Waltz,”<sup>36</sup> and the ubiquitous “Happy Wanderer.”

*I love to go a wandering, across the mountain track.  
And as I go, I love to sing, a knapsack on my back.  
Falderee, faldera, faldera hah hah hah hah . . .*<sup>37</sup>

But BBC Light was also well known for playing the occasional exotic record, and sometimes, tucked in between the stodgy postwar standards, you'd hear an absolute gem. That's when I heard American blues for the very first time. But I didn't know it was called “the blues.” I just thought it was “happy” music.

The tune was “Shake Rattle and Roll,”<sup>38</sup> an upbeat shuffle in the Kansas City style. I can't recall whether it was African American blues shouter Big Joe Turner's

<sup>34</sup> Annunzio Paolo Mantovani (1905-1980), a popular conductor and light orchestra entertainer, known for his signature “cascading strings” arrangements.

<sup>35</sup> Written 1903 by Swedish composer Hugo Emil Alfvén (1872 – 1960).

<sup>36</sup> Written 1882 by German composer Emile Waldteufel (1837-1915).

<sup>37</sup> Popular song, written 1953 by German composer Friedrich-Wilhelm Möller.

<sup>38</sup> Written in 1954 by Jesse Stone under the pseudonym Charles E. Calhoun.

seminal 1954 recording<sup>39</sup> or Bill Haley and the Comets' white cover version.<sup>40</sup>

Either way, it was a revelation.

“Get out in that kitchen and rattle those pots and pans!” exhorted the singer. And so we did, everyone — mums, dads, children, even grandparents. It was raucous lighthearted fun, just the thing that a war-weary English public needed.

By 1957 we were a family of five — my parents and me plus two younger sisters (Denise and Kim). We had a new house in the suburbs, a radio and TV, but no car and no refrigerator. Instead we had a cold cupboard called a “larder.” We did, however, have a telephone — a heavy bakelite model, perched on the hallway table like a huge, fat black cat.

My sisters and I weren't allowed to answer, let alone make outgoing calls. And if we did inadvertently pick up, we were expected to be exceedingly polite. It didn't ring much though, hardly at all — sometimes not for days. Billing time was measured by the second back then, and cash-strapped Brits were rather disinclined to waste their money on small talk. When it rang, you knew it was important.

Mum's family, the Bennetts, hailed from central London, so their natural style of speech, with its characteristic H-dropping, T-glots and diphthong alterations, was more or less Cockney. Throw in a smattering of Yiddish and Romany, and a smidgen of rhyming slang, and you have a very colourful urban dialect. (Wells, 1982)

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<sup>39</sup> Released in 1954 on Atlantic Records, produced by Jerry Wexler and Ahmet Ertegun.

<sup>40</sup> Released in 1954 on Decca Records (USA).

In traditionally class-conscious Britain, and especially highly stratified England, fine speech remains a mark of social status. Mother, bless her heart, having been brought up during difficult times and in modest circumstances, must have keenly appreciated the prestige associated with “received pronunciation” (charitably conceived in the United Kingdom as a way for lowborn inarticulates to converse intelligently with their betters). Sister Denise and I found it amusing that in regular conversation around the house, she’d talk like her familiar North London self, blithely dropping consonants and rounding out vowels. But on the telephone? Forget it. She sounded like *another* person altogether, all upper-crust and fancy. We called it her “talking to the Queen” voice.

In 1956, Mum’s eighteen year-old baby sister Jean, having completed her basic education, declared that she was going to travel abroad and see the world. An adventurous gal, ebullient and pretty — she only made it as far as Western Canada, where she met Walter Jansen, an affable and handsome country boy from McBride, British Columbia, an isolated logging-town on the western slope of the Rocky Mountains.

Walt had been working as a desk clerk at the King Edward Hotel in Banff, Alberta, when Aunt Jean and her female traveling companion stepped off the CPR transcontinental to inquire about an overnight room. They met, fell in love, got engaged, and Jean, aching to celebrate with the family, wrote a letter home to coordinate a long distance phone-call. Trans-Atlantic telephone communication in those days was expensive, and the time-zone difference (8hrs) made the logistics even more awkward. Jean arranged for the call to be taken at our house in Kenton, and Mum invited everyone, even preparing *hors d’oeuvres*. The phone rang on schedule at precisely 8:00pm, and everybody cheered when the impending nuptials were announced. Each then took turns chatting, with aunties bawling out best wishes, and inebriated uncles offering brotherly advice. Next morning, at

breakfast, my father made an announcement of his own.

“Children!” he said. “We’re moving to Canada.”

## Hell-ementary School

I didn't want to go to Canada. I wasn't even sure where it was. All the Canadian stamps in my children's philately had pictures of old King George VI,<sup>41</sup> so I naturally assumed it belonged to England.

“It's an island?” I declared with schoolboy confidence, “off the coast of Cornwall?”

Life was good in London. I was going to school with my friends, and playing cowboys and Indians, football, and cricket. The plan had been for me to write and pass the Eleven-Plus exam, then attend a reputable grammar school like Harrow County, Chandos, or Downer, and maybe even go on to university (which no one on either side of my family ever had).

*For 32 years, between 1944 and 1976, the Eleven-Plus examination was administered to British students in the final year of primary education, (typically ages 11-12). Focussing on three fundamental areas: arithmetic, writing, and general problem solving, results were used to determine which type of school the student should next go attend - grammar school, secondary modern, or technical school.*

*Initial criticism of the Eleven-Plus system highlighted various inherent social inequities and the negative long-term effects of “early streaming,” particularly on “late developers.” Critics alleging class bias claimed that children on the borderline of passing were more likely to be awarded grammar school placement if they came from middle and upper-class families, pointing out that questions about the role of household servants or classical composers were skewed towards children of more comfortable circumstances. Accordingly, the Eleven-Plus exam was redesigned during the 1960s to more resemble the standard IQ test. (Sampson, 1965, 195)*

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<sup>41</sup> Albert Frederick Arthur George Saxe-Coburg and Gotha (later changed to Windsor) 1895-1952. Reigning as King George VI.

Our boat train for Southampton left from London's Waterloo Station. We only took along a few suitcases, the heavy steamer trunks having been sent ahead. Our ship, the 18,000 ton Greek-registered *SS Homeric*, with berths for 150 first-class and 1000 tourist-class passengers, was 632 feet long, and had two funnels and two masts, with twin screws acquiring a top speed of 22 knots. But docked alongside the massive 84,000 ton *RMS Queen Elizabeth*,<sup>42</sup> it looked like a dinghy.

The six-day voyage to Quebec City began okay, but on the first day out we hit rough seas, and everyone (except me) got sick. Below decks reeked of stale vomit and the only air worth breathing was outside. The mid-Atlantic waves were enormous, like gigantic rolling mountains, with our heroic little vessel steaming steeply uphill one minute — then free-falling down the next. Everyone on deck was made to wear a life jacket and stay harnessed to a safety railing, lest they be washed away or blown overboard.

Day three found the ocean settled down, along with people's stomachs, and social activity on board got fully underway. But the various entertainments on offer were geared mostly towards adults (bingo, card playing, dancing etc), and except for breakfast, lunch, and dinner — there wasn't much for us kids to do.

One of the few other families on board with young children came from Kenya. They were the very first coloured folks I'd ever seen up-close and in-person. But they weren't "coloured" at all. Rather, they were black. Not brown. Not even dark brown. But blue-black, like bituminous coal.

Unlike us, who'd arrived at the dock by ordinary train, they got dropped off right at the gangplank in a huge Daimler touring car. I remember being impressed by all their matching luggage, and asking myself, "What are they doing down in

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<sup>42</sup> Built in 1938 for the Cunard/White Star Line

tourist class with us?”

While the mother favoured traditional African garb (a brightly coloured sarong-type dress with matching head scarf), the father dressed in fashionable western style. Even at seven years-old I could tell his haberdashery was top-drawer, with expensive shoes and slacks, worsted sportcoat, tailored dress shirt with gold cufflinks, and a selection of fine silk *cravattes*. And his public-school<sup>43</sup> accent, compared to my peoples’ relatively common mode of speech — sounded downright aristocratic.

Their oldest son was around my age, and we seemed to enjoy many of the same games, especially “cowboys and Indians.” It turned out that he too preferred to play the role of Indian, so we both did — sneaking upstairs into the First Class dining room to steal fancy pastries off the dessert table, thereby enraging the stewards who would then (to our insatiable delight) chase us up and down the spiral staircase from deck to deck to deck. What were they going to do to us? Lock us in the brig? Throw us overboard? Even seven year-olds have that one figured out.

I spent a lot of time on board with my new friend and his family, perhaps more than with my own lacklustre bunch. We played cards together, mostly Snap and Old Maid, and the dad taught me how to play chess, even deliberately losing a few games to get me started on my own.

*Scaffolding is a concept describing the process of guiding the learner from what is presently known to what is to be known, the idea being to help students perform tasks that would normally be slightly beyond their ability without that guidance from the teacher. The arms-length application of intellectual support, analogous to spotting a gymnast or weightlifter, allows*

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<sup>43</sup> Private schools in Britain are called “public” schools.



*learners to safely extend themselves, insulated from the fear of failure, to function at the cutting edge of their potential. (Hogan & Pressley, 1997)*

It was the morning of 28 May 1957, my eighth birthday. Jolted awake at dawn by the deafening silence (no engine noise, no wave motion, no vibrations), I groggily made my way upstairs and out onto the main deck, blinking and rubbing my eyes in the bright early sun. There we were, lying offshore at Quebec City, in the middle of the St. Lawrence River, dead in the water, waiting to be tugged in.

Then I saw it, on the starboard side, crowning the tip of a craggy escarpment, the magnificent *Chateau Frontenac* — a full-on, fairy-tale castle in the sky.

So, this is Canada, eh?

Disembarkation took several hours, with passengers lining up in the ship's forward lounge for preliminary processing. Then it was down the gangplank to the Customs Shed, where we were reunited with our heavy steamer trunks. Being English, unlike my East African shipmate and his family, we were invited to jump the *queue* (a convenient vestige of Empire). Waving goodbye, we quickly climbed aboard the train to Montréal, where we stayed overnight at the Laurentian Hotel in Dominion Square.

I immediately got land-sick, my body having become rather accustomed to the ship's constant heaving and lurching back and forth. So, while my parents and two younger sisters went downstairs for dinner in the hotel restaurant, I consoled myself alone in the room with a cup of tomato soup, and my first taste of American-style commercial television — *The Howdy Doody Show* hosted by Buffalo Bob Smith.

Next day we boarded the CPR Transcontinental for the journey west to Calgary, and our scheduled rendezvous with Auntie Jean and Uncle Walt. The three-day trip was comfortable enough, my father having sprung for two adjoining sleeping compartments. Rounding the rugged northern coast of Lake Superior, I made full use of the train's rooftop viewing car. The panorama was spectacular (just as I'd imagined).

West to Winnipeg, then out across the endless prairie — the trip took several days. Rumbling through stations with cinematic names like Swift Current, Moose Jaw and Medicine Hat, I secretly prayed for our train to be attacked by marauding Indians on horseback, just like on the telly back in England. Sadly, no such episode took place.

Our train arrived in downtown Calgary on 3 July 1957. There we were, fresh off the boat, standing on the burning sidewalk in front of the red-brick CPR station, waiting for our heavy luggage to be brought around.

“Finally,” I thought. “We’re here.”

Compared to city roads in England, Calgary's main street seemed both extraordinarily wide and oddly bereft of traffic. The midday sun was blazing hot; the air dusty and dry. But the sidewalks on both sides were lined with people milling around as if waiting for something special to happen.

*What's going on?*

Marvin Gaye, 1971<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Song written by Renaldo "Obie" Benson, Al Cleveland, and Marvin Gaye. It was the title track of Gaye's groundbreaking 1971 Motown LP *What's Going On*.

Then, I thought I heard something . . . not quite music, more like a busy jumble of competing sounds. Instinctively following my ears, I turned to look, only to be confronted by a mind-boggling apparition — the 45th annual Calgary Stampede parade,<sup>45</sup> replete with uniformed American-style marching bands, themed floats, clowns on motorbikes, acrobats on stilts, white-hatted cowboys on horseback, and hundreds of whooping red-Indians in full-feathered regalia heading directly towards us. Needless to say, in vernacular of my Cockney forebears — I was gobsmacked.

And then (as if that wasn't enough), to my absolute amazement, leading the parade aboard his magnificent palomino stallion Conquistador — rode Leo Carillo<sup>46</sup> (the Cisco Kid's colourful sidekick Pancho).

Following the trail blazed earlier by Auntie Jean, we took a Brewster Line bus along the Old Coach Road (now Hwy 1A) to nearby Banff. With its spectacular alpine scenery and ubiquitous red-uniformed Mounties, Banff National Park was (and still is) a world-renowned tourist mecca, with moose, elk, and bears roaming free, and cowboys and Red Indians everywhere (or so it seemed).

I spent the summer of 1957 in Banff learning how to be Canadian. The British accent was immediately jettisoned (the Beatles having not yet made such things fashionable). I got a crewcut, a pair of American style blue jeans, some Converse “Chuck Taylor” basketball sneakers (not those sissy English gym-shoes called plimsoles) and a bright red Flyer wagon (secondhand of course).

Finally, to complete the cultural transformation, I decided to drop the gender-ambiguous moniker Lindsay in favour of my slightly less embarrassing middle-

<sup>45</sup> “The greatest outdoor show on Earth,” inaugurated in 1912.

<sup>46</sup> San Diego-born Leopoldo Antonio Carillo (1880-1961). film and TV actor, vaudevillian, political cartoonist, and conservationist.

name Christopher. Indeed, in the rational mind of an eight year-old Cockney *émigré*, the most sensible thing to do was “fit in.”

Drawing upon his wartime experience as a signals operator, my father soon secured employment with the CPR in Edmonton, working the graveyard shift in what then passed for the telecommunications department (this still being the era of Teletype and Morse Code). We moved into a rented bungalow on the city’s south side,<sup>47</sup> on a street dominated by recent German immigrants. The neighbour kids all had names like Hans, Dieter, Eva, and Gretchen, and the *lingua franca* of backyard play was a sort of Anglo-Teutonic *patois*. This must have been more than a bit galling for my parents, having little more than a decade earlier worked so hard to repel the dreaded Hun.

On the first Monday of September, 1957, I began school at Prince Albert Elementary. Being new, I showed up a half-hour early, hoping to locate my Gr. 3 peer group in the schoolyard and make a few new friends. Contact was quickly made, and we played marbles and tag outside for a while before going in to our designated homeroom.

After taking attendance, the teacher (a young woman) passed around some sort of aptitude test focussing on three basic areas (arithmetic, reading, and writing), apparently to determine, for standardization purposes, the relative performance of schools within the citywide public education system.

It was dead easy, and I finished well before the time allotted. The teacher was initially disinclined to accept my early submission, but nevertheless acceded, and I was duly sent outside for early recess. Immediately upon returning to class with my mates, I was marched down to the Principal’s office and instructed to wait

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<sup>47</sup> The monthly rent was \$90.

quietly in an adjacent anteroom.

Through a glass partition I could see a short balding man wearing a three-piece, pinstriped suit in animated conversation with the teacher, who appeared to be nodding in concurrence.

“What did I do?” I wondered to myself. “Am I in some sort of trouble?”

Peering over from under his *pince-nez* spectacles, Principal Henderson<sup>48</sup> motioned me into his office.

“Well,” he said, shaking my hand firmly and glancing knowingly in the teacher’s direction. “It seems we have a young prodigy on our hands.”

It was explained to me that, not only had I finished the test in record time, but had scored 100%. And, instead of using simple printed letters like the other Gr. 3 kids, I’d written in full-on cursive longhand.

“I’m really not surprised,” he explained to the teacher. “You see, the English education system is far superior to our colonial brand.”

“What should we do then?” she inquired.

“Well,” said Henderson, musing out loud. “If he stays where he is, he’s bound to get bored and underperform in later grades — perhaps even drop out.”

“And we can’t let that happen!” piped the teacher. “Can we?!”

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<sup>48</sup> In accordance with academic convention regarding the “ethics of anonymity” and the protection of privacy and confidentiality, certain personal and place names have been changed.

“We’re in agreement then!” declared Henderson, and I was immediately marched up two flights of stairs to Miss Aldershot’s Gr. 5 class.

“Wait a minute!” I protested (only to myself, of course). “I’d much rather stay back with kids my own age. Besides, I’m really not that smart. Honestly! It’s just that in England they start you out really young, and cram all that stuff into you really fast. I just got a head start. Please no Miss, pleeeeeeeze!”

But my silent protestations went unregistered. Henderson the Anglophile would have his way. And life, for me, would never be the same. At afternoon recess, I could only stare through the fence at my former mates blithely horsing around in their segregated primary playground. Surgically separated from my peers, with no one else my own age to befriend, I went straight home after class.

“How was your first day of school in Canada dear?” inquired Mum.

“All right I suppose. By the way, they skipped me ahead two grades.”

“That’s nice,” she muttered, busily preparing dinner.

My father, worn out from working the late-night shift downtown, didn’t seem to mind either, proudly taking it as confirmation of Britain’s innate moral and intellectual “greatness.”

“As long as it doesn’t cost extra,” he said, casually tossing off consent.

I was eight, but most of Miss Aldershot’s Gr. 5 students were ten or eleven. And one or two, having recently arrived from non-English speaking countries in war-

ravaged Europe, and thus held back, were even older. Like Klaus, a strapping twelve year-old Dutch farm boy who had a monumental chip on his shoulder, and couldn't wait to take things out on the new boy — “Mr. Smarty Pants.”

Things were testy from the start, especially in class where I naturally did fairly well. But when I presumed to challenge his hegemony on the soccer pitch, his rage was unquenchable! I was his enemy for life, and that extended to his *droogs*,<sup>49</sup> who were legion.

The bullying wasn't just physical, but psychological as well. For instance, before recess one day, I took off my wristwatch and put it in my desk for safe keeping. A *bon voyage* present from my great-grandmother in Dover, though not really gold plated, it nonetheless looked impressive. Anyway, after playtime, it was gone. Prudently keeping quiet (not wishing to provoke), I later found it outside in the schoolyard, ground to pieces underfoot.

Message received. Loud and clear. I've never worn a wristwatch since.

I really did try to be one of the gang, even acting naughty now and then, but only childish things like passing notes and talking in class. One day, a particularly crude missive, which had already traveled several times around the room, ended up on my desk, catching Miss Aldershot's pencil-sharp spinster eye.

Jane Aldershot was the archetypal 1950s Alberta schoolmarm — astringently pretty, with hair pulled back in a bun, and dressed in a long shapeless flowered smock, demurely augmented by a double strand of fake pearls.

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<sup>49</sup> The word for “friend” in the fictitious argot known as Nadsat, used by disaffected teenagers in the 1962 dystopian novel *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess.

“What’s this?!” she snapped, drawing attention to the offending artifact. “Perhaps you’d like to share it with the class?”

“No Miss,” I replied, rather wishing it would simply disappear.

“We’ll see about that!” she said, abruptly snatching the paper from my hand. Her simple exasperation turned to abject horror as the grotesque nature of its contents was revealed (incredibly crude, but funny). With pursed lips and trembling hands, she grabbed me by the ear and dragged me out into the hallway.

“It’s not mine!” I pleaded.

“Whose is it then?!!” she shrieked.

“I don’t know Miss! Honestly!”

“Well then. We’ll just have to make an example out of you now — won’t we?”

Principal Henderson wasn’t pleased at all, and scowled meanly when shown the offending item. “I’m very, very disappointed,” he said. “Do you have anything else to say?” (taken as thinly veiled last chance to turn in my unknown accomplices).

“No sir,” I said, oddly resigned to my fate.

Opening a desk drawer, he reached in and pulled out an oversized razor strop with a wooden handle attached for his convenience.



“Both hands out in front!” he ordered. “Palms up!”

“You self-aggrandizing old bastard!” I said (only to myself, of course), “How dare you arbitrarily force me up into Gr. 5 with those sadistic twelve year-olds, and leave me alone to fend for myself. Fuck you!”

The lash came down, eight times — four on each hand.

It didn't hurt. Not the slightest. I was righteously inoculated from the pain (“stiff upper lip” and all that). But something else was deeply wrong, which hurt even more. I'd always enjoyed going to school. It had been one of my favourite things. Now, the very idea felt repulsive — like I'd been kidnapped, bugged, and tossed from the van.

“Thank you sir,” I muttered, through tightly clenched teeth. “I'll try better next time.”

*Pressey (1949) describes grade acceleration as “progress through an educational program at rates faster or at ages younger than conventional.” (in Southern & Jones, 2004, 5) Radical acceleration (RA) is defined as any combination of procedures that results in a student graduating from high school three or more years earlier than is customary (Stanley, 1978).*

*Paulus (1984), in support of RA, tends to downplay evidence of social and emotional harm being visited upon accelerants, even suggesting such accounts have been “disproved.” Gross (2004, 94) is more guardedly onside: “There is no indication of social or emotional maladjustment arising from well-planned programs of radical acceleration.”*

*Southern and Jones (2004, 2) concur, observing that “the few problems that have been experienced with acceleration have stemmed from incomplete planning.”*

*Robinson (2004, 64) agrees: "We can lay firmly to rest the myth that acceleration is inherently dangerous for gifted students [but] assessment of the child's abilities, skills, and personal characteristics should precede decision making."*

*Rogers (2004, 56) suggests that, "The question for educators seems to be not whether to accelerate a gifted learner, but rather how," further maintaining that "individual student readiness is critical."*

*"Acceleration [should] not mean pushing a child. It [should] not mean forcing a child to learn advanced material or socialize with older children before he or she is ready. Indeed, it is the exact opposite. Acceleration is about appropriate educational planning. It is about matching the level and complexity of the curriculum with the readiness and motivation of the child" (Colangelo et al, 2004, 1).*

*Each gifted child is unique, with different learning patterns and different emotional needs. "Students should have access to a variety of acceleration options so that they can choose the combination of options most suited to their circumstances." (Gross, 2004, 94)*

*Since some accelerative options do seem to present some risk, "Planning and collaboration among all parties involved [teachers, parents, and the student] are crucial." (Southern & Jones, 2004, 11)*

*"Students taking an unusually accelerated program should be actively involved in the planning and decision making regarding each stage in the program so that they may develop a sense of ownership." (Gross, 2003,91)*

*"Systematic plans to address concerns and potential consequences need to be developed prior to implementation. Unfortunately, plans are often implemented ad hoc, without knowledge or concern for later consequences." (Southern et al,1993,51)*

*Accordingly, Robinson (2004, 59) asks: "Will the students make friends in the new situation or become social isolates? Will younger boys find girls to date? How will they feel when their classmates start driving before they can? Will they be tempted into situations such as boy-girl relationships or smoking and alcohol use before they are ready to handle such issues?"*

*Will precious social and extra-curricular opportunities be lost, especially if the high school years are reduced? [And] what about the prom?"*

My parents weren't told about the strapping incident. At least, if they were, they didn't mention it (I sure didn't let on). I guess whipping eight year-olds was considered normal back then, and not something worth reporting. Or, maybe Henderson felt he had something to hide.

I went about my daily classroom business, trying hard not to step on other people's toes. But the bullying was relentless, and I'd have to vary my route to and from school just to stay intact. One good thing, however — unlike in highly regimented, class-structured England, where even seven year-olds were required to audition for the class choir, everyone was included at Prince Albert regardless of proficiency. In fact — it was compulsory.

Grades six and seven bled by (so to speak). Getting good marks was easy enough (stay out of trouble and tell 'em what they want to hear). I learned how to skate (literally and figuratively), and played hockey at the nearby outdoor community-centre ice rink with kids my own age. But not at school with the boys in my class. They were way too big and mean. Better to participate in solo sports, like swimming, at which I thankfully excelled.

As for non-sports related activities — I remember hearing the doorbell chime early one Sunday evening while gathered around the TV watching *The Ed Sullivan Show*. It was an enterprising young teenager selling mail-order Chet Atkins<sup>50</sup> Method guitar lessons, for three-dollars a month (including an instruction booklet and a special LP recording).

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<sup>50</sup> Chester Burton Atkins (1924-2001) was a Tennessee-born American guitarist and record producer known for his distinctive picking style.

“Gee,” I thought. “That sounds like fun.”

“Too expensive!” declared my father. “I’m not wasting hard-earned money on a cheap guitar. Besides, we don’t have a record player. Tell him to go away.”

Edmonton in the 1950s had only one television station — CFRN. School kids normally went home for lunch every day at noon, and, while washing down our peanut butter sandwiches with Carnation powdered milk, we’d watch whatever was on, like *The Liberace Show*, in colourful black and white.

Earlier that year (1957), just before we’d emigrated, there’d been a big fuss in England about an article in The Daily Mirror<sup>51</sup> (Mum’s favourite London tabloid) describing Liberace as:

*The summit of sex . . . the pinnacle of masculine, feminine, and neuter. Everything that he, she, and it can ever want . . . a deadly, winking, sniggering, snuggling, chromium-plated, scent-impregnated, luminous, quivering, giggling, fruit-flavoured, mincing, ice-covered heap of mother love. (Greenslade, 2009)*

Claiming that the paper had damaged his professional reputation by implying he was a homosexual<sup>52</sup> (particularly the phrase “fruit-flavoured”), Liberace sued for libel and won a substantial award. Sure, his quasi-classical histrionics appealed more to our parents’ old-fashioned musical tastes, but it was free lunchtime entertainment, and I rather liked the old queen.<sup>53</sup>

But I really liked my “rocket” radio, a crystal powered, earpiece model built to

<sup>51</sup> Written by veteran columnist Cassandra (William Connor).

<sup>52</sup> Homosexuality (decriminalized in Canada in 1967) was then illegal in the U.K.

<sup>53</sup> Wladziu Valentino Liberace (1919-1987) was a famous American entertainer and pianist of Polish and Italian descent. During the 1950s–1970s (when Elvis Presley and The Beatles were at the height of their popularity), he was the highest paid entertainer in the world.

resemble a German V-2 missile, which, if atmospheric conditions cooperated, could tune in as far south as Arkansas (especially late at night). Commercial radio in Edmonton during those days tended to feature mostly pop and old-school C&W standards, but I preferred the edgier Rockabilly artists like the Fendermen (from Michigan), the Burnette Brothers (Johnny and Dorsey from Memphis, Tennessee), and Buddy Knox (from Happy, in Texas).

*Come along and be my party doll.  
And I'll make love to you, to you.  
And I'll make love to you.<sup>54</sup>*

Buddy Knox, 1957

Having grown tired of languishing on the nightshift for CPR Telecom in Edmonton, my father decided to take a job with U.S. military-industrial giant IT&T, signing up for succession of one-year contracts on the DEW<sup>55</sup> Line (a series of isolated radar station in the high-Arctic designed to protect North America against Soviet nuclear attack). His first posting was in Barrow, Western Alaska. Then he was transferred clear across the continent, to the U.S. airbase in Thule, Greenland. The work involved cutting-edge Cold War technology and remuneration was commensurately high. The general idea was to stay on as long as possible, then repair south to reap the benefits of one's temporary sacrifice.

Communication with loved ones was virtually impossible, other than by post. There were no phone lines. Not even roads. Personnel had to fly in from great distance, typically on a military transport. Staying in touch meant knowing someone with a short-wave "ham" radio (which we did). Even still, actual conversation was limited to once or twice every several months.

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<sup>54</sup> Excerpte song , from *Party Doll*, written by Buddy Knox and Jimmy Bowen, released on the Roulette label.

<sup>55</sup> Acronym for Distant Early Warning.

The prairie winter (our third) settled in — five straight months of ice and snow ahead. With my father up north, and only a few expat Brits in Edmonton for friends, Mum grew lonely and homesick for her family in England. Finally, at breakfast one morning, with a blizzard raging outside . . .

“Children!” she said, “Your father and I have decided . . . We’re going back!”

## Cruel Britannia

The return trip back to England was much like the one which had brought us to Alberta, only in reverse. The CNR train out of Edmonton took the Yellowhead route east to Winnipeg, then the mainline over to Ottawa, and finally down to Montréal. Our ship was the Canadian Pacific fleet's *Empress of Britain*,<sup>56</sup> a substantial vessel of 26,000 gross tons.

I'd regale you with a detailed description of the voyage, but let's just say it was routine. Disembarking at the George Docks in Liverpool, we were driven down to London by Mum's brother Doug in his newly acquired Riley sedan. I noticed right away that the houses, streets and cars looked so much smaller and old-fashioned than in thoroughly modern Western Canada.

We settled into a rented house in Whitchurch Lane, Edgware, near the Canons Park tube station, just down the road from St. Lawrence Church, a medieval priory restored in 1715 by the 1st Duke of Chandos (an early patron of George Frederick Handel).

The first order of business was going to school. Accordingly, I was enrolled in the 4th Form at Stanburn Primary with kids my own age and size. The problem, however, was that primary schoolboys in England back then wore short trousers. But I'd brought over my jeans and slacks from Edmonton, and, having paid dearly for the right to wear them, wasn't about to trade them in for some stupid "little kid" pants.

It was late March, and the final term was well underway. I was only supposed to

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<sup>56</sup> Launched in 1956, it was the third CP vessel of the same name.

be at Stanburn for a few months, just long enough to write the Eleven-Plus Exam. Then, ideally, I'd be moving up to grammar school. Three years in Alberta, however, had skewed my educational perspective. British schools seemed strange.

For instance, morning assembly was divided into two sections. First, in the formal manner of a High Church vicar, the Head Master would read from Holy Scripture, conduct the singing of hymns, and then lead us all in prayer (typically thanking God for having been born English).

Then, with the ecclesiastical portion of the program concluded, he'd slam his Bible shut and wave his purple-robed arm dramatically over towards a side entrance, at which point the doors would fly open, and the school's half-dozen or so non-Christian students would file in and take their designated seats in the front row.

*Induco judaicum alio!*<sup>57</sup>

Having just recently returned from North America, and being rather disinclined to regress fashion-wise, I naturally showed up on my first day of school wearing long trousers (albeit with a three-button, worsted-tweed sports coat and a tie). The homeroom teacher, apparently unimpressed with my choice of wardrobe (I thought I looked fine), promptly marched me down to see the Head Master, who sent me home early with a note for my mother.

Mum and I arrived early the next morning, and were ushered into the HM's oak-panelled office. He was polite at first, charming even, but when push came to shove, the gloves came off . . .

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<sup>57</sup> Latin for "Bring in the Jews!"



“The uniform code is sacrosanct!” he declared. “He must conform!”

“No way!” I protested. “Not after all the crap I’ve been through.”

“I’ve tried talking to him,” pleaded Mum. “But his mind seems made up.”

“We’ll see about that!” said the Head Master, brusquely showing us the door.

*A prefect is a pupil who, under the direction of a senior prefect known as the Head Boy or Head Girl, has been given limited, trustee-type authority over other pupils in the school. Traditionally, in the British school system, students in the higher forms (grades) have wielded considerable coercive power, effectively controlling the school’s operation outside the classroom. Though the practice is now abolished in the UK, they were once even allowed to administer corporal punishment. Due to health and safety regulations, and concerns about being held legally responsible for any injury (mental, emotional, and physical) school staff have in recent years tended to more strictly limit the responsibilities that prefects may hold. (Clarke, 2003)*

I’d heard through the grapevine that the prefects were out looking for me. I’d seen them around, patrolling the hallways in their precious striped blazers, with their precious little prefect pins, terrorizing the younger kids. I didn’t like them. Not one bit. Licensed bullies, that’s all they were. It took a few days, but finally, at lunchtime, they cornered me in the cafeteria.

“Watcha Yank!” yelled the Head Boy, a chubby tousle-haired twit. “Where do you think you’re going?”

I kept quiet, not wishing to cause a scene.

“Looks like somebody here doesn’t want to follow the rules,” he prodded, playing to the gathering crowd. “And we can’t let that happen — can we?”

*It can’t happen here!*<sup>58</sup>

Frank Zappa, 1966

“Howzit goin’ guys?” I said, giving it my full-on friendly best.

“He finks he’s better than us, he does,” piped his lieutenant, a snotty little shit, with pimples and a runny nose.

“Well then,” said the Head Boy, “We’ll just ‘ave to take him down a notch!”

They circled threateningly, slowly inching forward, tightening the noose.

“Wait a minute!” I said, boldly challenging all four. “I’ve been terrorized by way bigger assholes than you. You don’t scare me one little bit.”

Rattled by my unscheduled resistance, Head Boy paused dead in his tracks. The lunchroom crowd, as if sensing a change in barometric pressure, began to murmur among themselves.

“Look at yourself, you fat ugly pig,” I taunted, cynically targeting his corpulence. “What are you going to do? Hurt me?”

“B b b . . . better do what we say!” he stammered. “Or else!”

“Bring it on Dumbo!” I countered, gamely drawing a line in the sand.

<sup>58</sup> Song title, from the 1966 Verve Records LP *Freakout!*, written by Frank Zappa.

Stalemate!

Suddenly realizing who among us was wearing the short pants . . . the Feckless Four gave in. The crowd, clearly welcoming a shift in schoolyard power relations, mumbled in accord. Some even cheered.

“Hip hip . . . !?”

“And, by the way!” I taunted, following them down the hall as they skulked away in shame. “I’m not a Yank! I’m CANADIAN!”

*Howard Becker (1951; 1963) noted that, among the many musicians of his professional acquaintance in Chicago ca. 1950, the more artistically committed ones tended to have experienced significant conflict in their youth when dealing with persons in positions of authority. Frith (2004, 224) similarly highlighted contentious relations which often later served to preclude normal compliance with mainstream standards and ideals in adulthood. “These extreme artistic and social attitudes [were] part of a total rejection of conventional society.”*

The Head Master caved in too, the long trousers stayed, and, for the short remainder of that final term at Stanburn Primary — I was the 4th Form’s very own James Dean. And being hormonally more advanced than we awkward, muddle-headed boys, the girls wouldn’t leave me alone (an ego-boosting bonus to be sure).

Next up was the Eleven-Plus exam, and I got top marks in everything, except for English money of course, which, before decimalization in 1971, was a confusing mishmash of shillings, guineas, sovereigns and halfpenny-farthings — all calculated using some strange, archaic, base-12 math system.

Adrian Fisher, my best friend at Stanburn Primary, came from a moderately affluent Jewish family. He lived in a large, fully detached home in a leafy street on the far side of Canons Park, and had lots of neat stuff — like a 15-speed Italian racing bike, fashionable designer clothes, and an extensive collection of Rock & Roll records.

We were at that clumsy age — not quite old enough to do anything really fun, like get into “A” (adult) rated movies, which back then meant anything even mildly raunchy (like the Carry On series). So, with little else to do outside of school, we killed time playing pinball at the chip shop drinking three-penny Cokes and listening to the jukebox.

Rock & Roll in England c.1960 was of two distinct sorts — either the exotic American import (with its sexy, race-tinged authenticity) or Britain's *ersatz* domestic brand. Elvis Presley, while away in the Army, had been eclipsed by Buddy Holly (even in death) and the Everlys (Don and Phil) were now on top. Surf music hadn't been invented yet, but “Walk Don't Run” by The Ventures (from Tacoma, Washington) was burning up the U.K. charts.

British Rock & Roll was comparatively lame (except for popular “King of Skiffle” Lonnie Donegan).<sup>59</sup> The male singers of the day typically had contrived surnames like “Steele” (Tommy), “Fury” (Billy) and “Faith” (Adam). Amidst a host of limp pretenders, the reigning British rock-star then, hands down, was Cliff Richard. Young Cliff, in my view, was a bit of a pill, but his instrumental back-up band The Shadows were superb. Indeed, their lead-guitarist Hank B. Marvin<sup>60</sup> was my very first “guitar hero.”

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<sup>59</sup> Galsgow-born. East London-based Anthony James Donegan (1931-2002) Skiffle music is Appalachian style of folk-blues.

<sup>60</sup> Born Brian Robson Rankin in 1941, in Newcastle-upon-Tyne , U.K.

The Spring semester at Stanburn finally came to a close, and summer holidays loomed. Adrian and his parents repaired to the South of France (as was their annual habit), so I amused myself alone by watching the 1960 Rome Olympics on TV, listening to Dutch pirate radio station Veronica, and teaching myself how to play The Shadows' hit record "Apache"<sup>61</sup> on the arch-top acoustic guitar that Mum had bought for £5 at an outdoor market in High Street Harrow.

London was extra hot that summer. So, to keep us occupied, Mum took my sisters and me to the annual Hampstead Heath Fair, an unpretentious little urban fête with games, rides, confections and other entertainments — like teenage Rock and Roll bands. I remember it well, because it was the very first time I ever saw an electric guitar up-close and in-person.

There was this snazzily attired Teddy-boy hanging around the carnival midway, leaning against a booth and chatting up his "dolly bird." Dressed in the zoot-suited hipster style of the day, with a greasy duck-tail hairdo and sharply-pointed, Italian "winkle-picker" shoes, he was casually cradling a metallic blue Höfner<sup>62</sup> six-string model, replete with plastic knobs and chrome switches.

With a towering beehive hairdo, too much make-up, tight sweater, high-heels, and short leather skirt — she was a bit of tart — climbing all over the guy, kissing his face, sucking his fingers, and groping him everywhere in every which way.

I sidled up closer, to get a better look (at the guitar).

"I'm onstage in two minutes," I heard him say. "You really must be running along. I'll drop by later, after the show. We'll go out."

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<sup>61</sup> Written by Jerry Lordon, released by The Shadows on Columbia Records (UK) 1960.

<sup>62</sup> Made in West Germany.

Crestfallen, the girl began to sulk, but the fellow was apparently consoling enough that she wandered off happy, even turning to blow him a kiss before boarding her bus. I lingered for a few extra seconds, hoping to get another glimpse of his exotic device, but as soon as the first bird had flown, another similarly well-endowed creature sidled by.

“Play me a tune and I’m yours,” she purred, seductively eyeing his instrument.

That was it! My soul was forfeit. Tracking my mother and sisters down in the carnival crowd . . .

“Can I have an electric guitar Mum,” I pleaded. “Puleeeze?”

Having handily passed the Eleven-Plus Exam, I was assigned to nearby Downer Grammar School,<sup>63</sup> and was very much looking forward to attending in the Fall. Accordingly, to make sure my official maroon and blue striped blazer was both in stock and in my size, I visited the school’s High Street tailor. But my father, having eaten his fill of Eskimo pie and whale blubber pudding up on the DEW Line, had finally decided to come down from the Arctic and return to civilization in the South. And Mum, missing all her snazzy North American mod-cons, the wide-open spaces, and the fresh Canadian air, was at the same time growing tired of stuffy old class-conscious Britain. Besides, two more of her siblings had since emigrated.

So, my sisters and I weren’t entirely surprised to hear the news.

“Kids!” she said. “We’re going back.”

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<sup>63</sup> Founded in 1950, and named after Thomas Downer, a magistrate and accountant of Harrow who died in 1502

## Sick-ondary School

I won't bother you with yet another transatlantic seafaring saga, except to say, "If you've seen one monstrous mid-ocean wave, you've seen them all." Once again, we sailed on the *SS Homeric*, this time from Liverpool via Glasgow to Montréal. Then, linking up with my father in the lobby of the Sheraton Hotel in downtown Detroit, we drove west — arriving Vancouver in midsummer 1961.

Vancouver's racial complexion back then was overwhelmingly white, especially in the suburbs. Sure, there were some Asian faces, mostly in Chinatown and on the Eastside. But everywhere else, the Anglo-Saxon ethos ruled. Indeed, in certain parts of town, notably Shaughnessy and the British Properties, restrictive covenants remained in place prohibiting the resale of residential properties to "coloured" people and Jews. (Davis, 1998)

There weren't many black folks, as far as I could tell. And those that did live here, it was commonly assumed, couldn't possibly be from here, but must have arrived from someplace else (most likely the USA). History, however, tells us that "blues people" (Baraka, 1963) have been part of Vancouver's cultural tapestry for generations, indeed since its very earliest days as a municipality. (Compton, 2002)

*In 1859, seeking to stifle American expansionism in the far-flung colony of British Columbia, Governor Sir James Douglas decided to increase the number of settlers sympathetic to British standards and values. The mulatto son of a Glasgow merchant and a free black woman from British Guyana<sup>64</sup> Douglas held a lifelong aversion to slavery which, though officially banned in British territories since 1772, was still being practiced in many parts of the U.S.A. (Blakey-Smith, 1960)*

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<sup>64</sup> On the northern coast of South America.

*Concluding that Blacks, historically the victims of American slavery, might be more inclined than others to support British rule, Douglas extended a personal invitation to more than 600 African American homesteaders (half the Negro population of San Francisco at the time). Accepting the offer of free transportation, full British citizenship, and male suffrage, the group sailed en masse to Victoria, arriving in 1859 (Kilian, 1978)*

*The non-Indian “settler” population of B.C. at that time was roughly 10,000. Blacks in the region therefore constituted a substantial (and highly visible) minority. Others followed, spurred on by the discovery of gold in the Central Interior. For most, however, their move north was “an exodus from increasingly repressive [American] racial laws.” (Compton, 2001, 17) Some returned to the U.S. following the end of the Civil War in 1865, drawn by the promise of full citizenship. But, their numbers were replenished over the ensuing decades, as the reality of “half free” existence under Jim Crow<sup>65</sup> set in. (DuBois, 1903)*

*The City of Vancouver was incorporated in 1886. A thriving port (and West Coast terminus of the CPR transcontinental railroad) by 1900 its population had grown to nearly 100,000, with business and social life centering around the bustling intersection of Hastings and Main (crowned in 1903 by the monumental new Carnegie Library).*

*Black folks continued to arrive, from both the United States and other parts of Canada, notably Edmonton and Winnipeg. Most came as individuals or with family groups - “not as a part of a larger exodus.” (Compton, 2001, 19)*

*A distinctly black neighborhood began to develop known as Hogan’s Alley, east of Main Street, near the Great Northern railway station, where male residents traditionally found employment as Pullman-porters and dining-car waiters.*

*Dorothy Nealy, in a 1979 interview, herself recalled arriving from Winnipeg in 1938. “When I got here,” she said, “this district was all Negroes, from Main Street down to Campbell Avenue, just like it is with Chinese folks today.” (Ibid., 202)*

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<sup>65</sup> The name applied to the violently oppressive social and political regime dedicted to the perpetual subordination of Blacks withing mainstream (white) American society (especially in the deep South).



Factoring in the North Atlantic boat crossing, the train ride to Detroit, and the transcontinental automobile trip — the Mitchell clan had been “on the road” for more than a month. Relations with my father, already strained, had sadly further deteriorated. He’d always worked the nightshift, even in England, so our daily schedules had never seemed to mesh. And now he’d completely missed three very important developmental years of my life (9-12).

We rented a three-bedroom apartment on Eastern Avenue in North Vancouver,<sup>66</sup> and quickly settled in with some used furniture, a TV and a radio, and a bicycle for me so I could ride around the neighborhood and check things out.

My parents then contacted School District 144 regarding my upcoming September enrollment. On the strength of both my earlier Edmonton grades and my Eleven-Plus Exam score, I was assigned to Sutherland Junior High School, where the Principal opted to uphold Henderson’s earlier dictum, and put me in Gr. 9.

There I was, a twelve year-old in class with teenagers of fourteen and fifteen, two grades ahead of myself — again! Thankfully I’d grown a few inches over the summer and could more easily pass. But nobody had bothered to ask me about it. No one seemed to care how I felt. I just wanted to be normal, and fit in with the crowd. But education experts? Apparently they knew better.

Junior high school happened to coincide with two important developments in British Columbia education policy. First, having routinely for several generations been taken from their families and sent to church-run residential schools,<sup>67</sup> Indian children were beginning to be integrated within the public school system.

(Tennant, 1990) In North Vancouver, this meant a lot of new students with

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<sup>66</sup> For \$200 per month.

<sup>67</sup> Under the *aegis* of the Indian Act, enacted by the Parliament of Canada in 1876 under the provisions of Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act of 1867.

surnames like Nahanee, Mathias, Jacobs, and Baker, etc. They looked tough, acted tough, and were tough (even the girls). Plus they tended to stick together.

*It is commonly thought that original residents of B.C. arrived about 10,000 years ago from Asia via land-bridge across the Bering Strait. Europeans, arrived much later. (Miller 2003). Sir Francis Drake is believed to have sailed by in 1579 aboard his legendary flagship, the Golden Hind (Bawlf, 2001), and Ionnis Fokas, a Greek captain sailing for Spain as Juan de Fuca, visited in 1592. It was 200 years before Spain's Jose Maria Narvaez came in 1792, followed the next year by British Captain George Vancouver. British interests prevailed, however, with early activity revolving around a lucrative offshore fur-trade.*

*Invoking the legal principle of terra nullius (Latin meaning "empty land"), the Hudson's Bay Company imposed regional control, regulating the land for its own commercial purposes. Displacement of aboriginal authority over the land was to depend on European numerical superiority, thus settlements were established on the B.C. at Fort Langley on the mainland (1827), and at Fort Victoria on the southern tip of Vancouver Island (1843). (Ibid.)*

*War against the Indians was never officially declared (unlike in the United States) but records show that British naval forces did shell and burn unprotected coastal villages in 1850, 1851, 1864 and 1877. And in 1864, Royal Marines (aided by armed volunteers) were employed to suppress a rebellion among the Chilcotin in B.C.'s interior.*

*Native populations in B.C. declined dramatically as a result of epidemic disease, beginning with smallpox at the end of the 18th century, measles in 1848, and influenza in 1849. (Harris, 1997)*

*In 1884 the federal government outlawed the potlatch, the major social, economic and political institution of Pacific north coast First Nations, thus effectively abrogating Indians' "right of assembly." Not until 1951 were First-Nations folks legally allowed to gather in large numbers. Nor had they been allowed to retain lawyers. And Indians were not granted the right to vote federally until 1960. Prior to that, they were required to give up their aboriginal status to be considered Canadian citizens under the law. (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009)*

*“The social problems plaguing Native peoples in Canada [today] are caused by aggressive, oppressive and violent social, political and governmental systems which reflect embedded notions of imperialism, colonization and assimilation. (Damm, 1993, 95)*

There was this brown skinned kid in my homeroom class at Sutherland named Jim Crawford. A bookish boy, well-behaved, and articulate — he wore thick horn-rimmed glasses, and pretty much kept to himself. We became pals (sort of) and I remember being curious about his ethnic derivation, having him pegged as vaguely South Asian — Bengalese or Pakistani perhaps.

Apparently he was First Nations from Haida Gwaii.<sup>68</sup> Who knew? Not me.

The second historic educational development at Sutherland involved the assimilation of severely disabled children into the mainstream classroom. For instance, there was this fellow in Grade 9 named Charlie Simpson, who suffered from a ruthlessly debilitating case of Cerebral Palsy. Confined to a wheelchair, his body was a maelstrom of spasticity, all twisted and contorted, with arms and legs alternately flailing aimlessly one minute, then ratcheted up into a tight fetal ball the next. Sometimes he'd have seizures and just sit there, all tied-up in knots, twitching helplessly with globs of drool dripping down his chin onto to his firmly seat-belted lap. His speech was virtually unintelligible, to the unfamiliar ear sounding more like grunts and wails.

“He’s not retarded,” they assured us (like it was contagious). “Physically handicapped only.”

*The quality of life for disabled children [in schools] improved greatly throughout the 1960s . . . the problems of differential programming, along with some possible solutions, were mapped out in detail [and] parents*

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<sup>68</sup> Formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands.

*increased their demands that their exceptional children be provided with educational services in their local school districts. (Winzer, 1993, 363)*

Every day (unless necessarily absent), Charlie would somehow find a way to navigate his chair down the hallways from class to class, pushing it along with his good foot, and steering and braking with his opposing elbow. Then, parked up against the wall at rear of the classroom, he'd gamely poke away on a portable typewriter, sometimes landing an errant finger, sometimes using a pencil held between tightly clenched teeth, and other times using his nose — whatever worked best.

Charlie Simpson, in every cruel schoolyard sense of the word, was a hopeless “spaz.”<sup>69</sup> I thought I had it rough, being so much younger than my classmates. But his burden was downright monstrous! While his presence was occasionally unsettling, his courage and perseverance were undeniable, and some of us (though certainly not all) came to hold him in the highest regard.

*Mister you're a better man than I.*<sup>70</sup>

The Yardbirds, 1965

I finally did manage to make friends with some boys my own age two grades below. We did normally immature twelve year-old things together, like building model hotrods and watching pro-wrestling on TV. *Maple Leaf Wrestling* from Toronto was shown on the local CBC station<sup>71</sup> on Saturday nights. As part of the New York-based National Wrestling Alliance<sup>72</sup> (NWA), it featured all our

<sup>69</sup> A derogatory term, often used hurtfully, from the word “spastic,” referring to spasticity, a medical condition characterised by hypertonia, or a high degree of muscle tightness.

<sup>70</sup> Song title. Written by Mike and Brian Hugg. Recorded by the Yardbirds on the 1965 Epic LP *Having a Rave-Up with the Yardbirds*, produced by Georgio Gomelsky.

<sup>71</sup> The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Channel 3 CBUT, with studios on Georgia Street at Thurlow.

<sup>72</sup> Founded in 1948 by U.S. promoter Paul “Pinkie” George. Administered from 1960-1963 by Toronto-based promoter Frank Tunney.

favourite big-time stars of the day — Killer Kowalski,<sup>73</sup> Dick the Bruiser,<sup>74</sup> Sweet Daddy Siki<sup>75</sup> (aka: the Negro Gorgeous George),<sup>76</sup> and the Japanese bad guy tandem of Kenji Shibuya<sup>77</sup> and Mitsu Arakawa<sup>78</sup> (managed by the dastardly Mr. Fuji<sup>79</sup>).

There were exotic lady wrestlers too, led by perennial Women's Champion, the Fabulous Moolah.<sup>80</sup> And the midgets, like Little Beaver<sup>81</sup> and Sky Low Low.<sup>82</sup> Extra-large personalities as well, like the giant Haystack Calhoun<sup>83</sup> and Chief Jay Strongbow,<sup>84</sup> whose excruciating submission hold “the Indian Deathlock” was seemingly unbeatable. Top billing, however, was reserved for steadfast Canadian Champion — Whipper Billy Watson.<sup>85</sup>

We also enjoyed watching All-Star Wrestling, a local promotion based out of CHAN TV in nearby Burnaby, which featured a stable of local NWA affiliated wrestlers augmented by touring professionals on revolving short-term contracts (much like itinerant vaudeville entertainers in earlier times).

*“Wrestling,” writes Roland Barthes (1957) “is not a sport, it is a spectacle, and it is no more ignoble to attend a wrestled performance of Suffering than a performance of the sorrows of Arnolphe or Andromaque.” Barthes includes wrestling among the great forms of public art, such as ancient druidian solar spectacles, Greek drama, and bullfighting. Such spectacles, he writes “have the remarkable ability to be what they’re not -*

<sup>73</sup>Windsor, Ontario-born Edward Walter Spulnik (1915 - 2008)

<sup>74</sup> Indiana-born William Fritz Afflis (1929 - 1991)

<sup>75</sup> Jamaica- born Toronto resident Reginald Siki (b.1940)

<sup>76</sup> Nebraska-born George Raymond Wagner (1915 - 1963), known for his arrogant and outrageously flamboyantly ring persona.

<sup>77</sup> Utah-born Robert Shibuya

<sup>78</sup> Japan-born Mitsukazu “Mack” Arakawa (1927 - 1997)

<sup>79</sup> Hawaii-born Harry Fujiwara (b.1935)

<sup>80</sup> South Carolina-born Mary Lillian Ellison (1923 - 2007)

<sup>81</sup> St. Jerome, Quebec-born Lionel Giroux (1933 - 1995)

<sup>82</sup> Montreal-born Marcel Gauthier (1928 -1998)

<sup>83</sup> Texas-born William D. Calhoun (1933 -1989)

<sup>84</sup> Philadelphia-born Joseph Luke Scarpa (b. 1928)

<sup>85</sup> Toronto-born William Potts (1917 -1990)

*that is, to represent ideas grander than the actions they depict.” Clearly, in The World of Wrestling, “things aren’t what they seem.”(Laver, 1972)*

Consistent with grappling tradition, the *All-Star Wrestling* roster was divided into good guys (baby faces) and bad guys (rule breakers, or heels). Eric Froelich<sup>86</sup> was the archetypal “face.” Handsome and unfailingly sportsman-like, he lost every time. American Don Leo Jonathan,<sup>87</sup> cast in the role of crusading knight-errant, was routinely summoned to rid the town of dastardly villains. Visiting low-lives included the notorious Hard-Boiled Haggerty,<sup>88</sup> the Masked Outlaw, and Dory Funk Sr.<sup>89</sup> Vancouver-based veteran Sandor Kovacs<sup>90</sup> could be either a good bad guy or a bad good guy, depending on what the weekly script called for.

The local “big man” (and co-owner of the franchise) was Western Canada’s very own two-time NWA World Champion Gene Kiniski.<sup>91</sup> Self-proclaimed as “Canada’s Greatest Athlete,” Gentleman Gene was an entertaining study in contradiction — joyfully sadistic one minute, and obsequiously polite the next.

We thoroughly enjoyed the weekly spectacle, gleefully suspending our collective disbelief. But we weren’t stupid. We knew it wasn’t about the outcome — like who won or lost. Rather, it was all about the wrestlers themselves, and their extraordinary biographies — however absurd.

Twelve year-old *aficionados* of the absurd, we were also avid readers of Mad Magazine.

<sup>86</sup> West German-born Udo Froelich (b.1937)

<sup>87</sup> Utah-born Don Heaton (b.1931) Also known as the Mormon Giant.

<sup>88</sup> Born Don Stansauk (1926-2004 )

<sup>89</sup> Texas-born Dorrance Wilhelm Funk (1919-1973) also doubled as the Masked Outlaw.

<sup>90</sup> Hungarian-born Sandor Kovacs (1920-2004)

<sup>91</sup> Edmonton, Alberta-born Eugene Nicholas Kiniski (1928-2010).

*Founded in 1952 by editor Harvey Kurtzman and publisher William Gaines (later his son Maxwell Gaines) Mad Magazine offered parody and satire on all aspects of American life and popular culture, politics, entertainment, and public figures, with a keen joy in exposing the fakery behind the public image. (Boyd, 2007)*

*“[Mad] instilled in me a habit of mind, a way of thinking about a world rife with false fronts, small print, deceptive ads, booby traps, treacherous language, double standards, half truths, subliminal pitches and product placements; it warned me that I was often merely the target of people who claimed to be my friend; it prompted me to mistrust authority, to read between the lines, to take nothing at face value, to see patterns in the often shoddy construction of movies and TV shows; and it got me to think critically in a way that few actual humans charged with my care ever bothered to.” (Ibid.)*

*“Mad was a revelation: it was the first to tell us that the toys we were being sold were garbage, our teachers were phonies, our leaders were fools, our religious counselors were hypocrites, and even our parents were lying to us about damn near everything.” (Siano, 1994)*

*“My radical journey began with Mad Magazine,” said American political activist Tom Hayden<sup>92</sup> (Herman, 2007) And film critic Roger Ebert (1998) concurred, saying, “I didn’t read Mad, I plundered it for clues to the universe.”*

*After Mad . . . drugs were nothing.*

*Patti Smith<sup>93</sup> (in Evanier, 2003)*

English families in North Vancouver, “British” Columbia c.1962 naturally tended to socialize around their children’s weekend soccer games. That’s how my parents became acquainted with Ron Bennett, a robust red-haired Londoner, who had recently emigrated from the U.K. with his wife and kids.

<sup>92</sup> Founding member (1960) of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) at the University of Michigan (Ann Arbor).

<sup>93</sup> Chicago-born rock singer and visual artist Patricia Lee Smith (b. 1946).

We were at a summer afternoon BBQ on Ron Bennet's suburban backyard patio. My father and mother (nee Bennett) were there, along with my uncle Bill Bennett. Plus, my aunt Jean (nee Bennett) and her husband Walt Jansen were in town, visiting from Banff.

"My goodness Ronnie," said Aunt Jean, gazing curiously at his ginger mop. "You look just like my old dad. What part of London did you say your family was from?"

Well, believe it or not . . . that was how we discovered that Great-grandad was a bigamist. Folks were skeptical at first. Pure coincidence they figured. But subsequent genealogical inquiry has shown it to be true. Imagine! To stumble across this information, seventy years later, and half way around the world . . . ?

Summer that year was particularly hot, and I recall spending numerous lazy afternoons at the Mahon Park public swimming pool, horsing around in the turquoise-blue chlorinated water and dropping cannonballs off the high diving board. Some pals and I were showering one day, preparing to head home for supper, when somehow we managed to attract the ire of some older toughs, who began snapping their towels at us and making derisive comments. One of our group had apparently done something, or said something, or looked at somebody the wrong way. It wasn't clear (big trouble nonetheless).

Dressing quickly, we exited out a side door, but several blocks away bumped into the same nasty bunch. I looked around for my buddies. No such luck. Apparently they'd sensed trouble, and had somehow slipped away, leaving me to defend myself alone.



“Come on guys,” I pleaded, vainly trying to negotiate a truce. “This isn’t fair.”

Clearly unsympathetic, they closed in around me, cutting off retreat.

“Hey listen,” I said, “if we do have to fight (and I really, really don’t want to) at least let me take you on one at a time.”

Thinking it over for a second, then pointing to the smallest of the bunch, the leader granted permission to proceed.

“Hurry up for Christ’s sake! My mum’s got dinner on.”

The designated first combatant strutted forward, pausing briefly to remove his wind-breaker.

Eureka! Opportunity knocks but once. So I kicked him squarely in the balls.

Falling to the ground in a crumpled heap, and moaning in agony with both arms still tangled up behind in his jacket sleeves, he couldn’t reach around to massage his aching nutsack.

“So far so good!” I thought. “What now?”

Before his friends could organize a counterattack, I quickly placed my right leg in the vee of his crotch, crossed both his legs behind mine (right over left), reached back underneath with my right foot to hook his right ankle, then pulled myself fully upright.

The Indian Deathlock!<sup>94</sup> Perfectly executed! Just like on TV.

*Professional wrestling is real . . . and everything else in the world is fake.*

Frank Deford<sup>95</sup> (attr.)

His agony was now twofold. “Heeeeelp!” he screamed, desperately urging his associates to intervene.

With the hold firmly locked-in, I straightened my leg to further intensify the pressure, the loudness of his screams rising with each incremental increase in torque.

“Back away!” I warned the advancing group, “Or I’ll break his leg.”

“Do as he says!” he shrieked. “Puleeeze!”

Still unconvinced, they instead loomed even closer. So, I cranked it up another notch and started dragging the guy on his back down the middle of the road.

“Do as he says!” he screamed again.

Finally persuaded, the gang backed away to a useful distance. Quickly releasing the hold, I turned and ran like hell, never looking back.

“Yikes!” I thought, safely out of range. “What just happened?” Whatever it was,

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<sup>94</sup> Also known as “the British figure-four leg-lock” the Indian Deathlock was made famous by American wrestler Chief Jay Strongbow (Joseph Scarpa). Wrestling mythology holds it to have been a traditional Apache torture technique.

<sup>95</sup> Baltimore-born Benjamin Franklin Deford, III (b. 1938) is a senior contributing writer for *Sports Illustrated*, author, and social commentator.

it sure felt good,

*“Improvisation, as it functions within the blues idiom, is something that not only conditions people to cope with disjuncture and change, but also provides them with a basic survival technique which is both commensurate with and suitable to the rootlessness and discontinuity so characteristic of human existence in the contemporary world . . . However such improvisation proceeds, when it succeeds it puts you on good terms with life [generating] an atmosphere of well-being and celebration.” (Murray, 1999, 113)*

*“The ancestral imperative of blues procedure is completely consistent with and appropriate to those of the frontiersman, the fugitive slave, and the picaresque hero, the survival of whom depends largely on an ability to operate on dynamics equivalent to those of the vamp, the riff, and most certainly the break, which jazz musicians regard as the moment of truth or the disjuncture which brings out your personal best.” (Murray, 1996, 56).*

I got decent marks in junior high school. The work was routine and I didn't have to try particularly hard. I saw lots of A's and B's, with the odd C minus — like in Industrial Arts and Physical Education. Curiously, whereas my poor marks in metalwork and carpentry were entirely justified (I was truly incompetent), my P.E. grades seemed patently unjust. The gym teacher, apparently unaware that I was two grades younger than my classmates, wrongly took my normal twelve year-old's performance to be sub-par.

It was becoming painfully clear that every teacher from Gr. 5 forward had been “out of the loop” with respect to my accelerated status. Am I suggesting that Principal Henderson (who initially advanced me) and the Sutherland School Principal (who subsequently sustained the ruling) each neglected to inform their subordinates regarding my situation?

Did the system let me down?

*J'accuse!*<sup>96</sup>

Even if my teachers did know, they didn't seem to care. Indeed, never in all the years following my initial acceleration in Gr. 3, did anybody in authority inquire as to whether I was having any difficulty getting along, either socially or scholastically. Not once! Anywhere! Ever! Perhaps if I'd been more troublesome or had received poor grades . . . ?

Consistent with expert pedagogical opinion at the time, Edmonton Public School Board policy regarding “grade skipping” was clear. EPSB Archives (1956-59) confirm that the practice was “generally discouraged,” and “especially in the early grades,” with exceptions permissible only in conjunction with:

- (a) comprehensive testing (academic and psychological)
- (b) lengthy observation, both in-class and outside school
- (c) extensive interviews, with both student and parents
- (d) ongoing consultation with both student and parents
- (e) special consideration being given to alternate modes of acceleration, and
- (e) the establishment and maintenance of a long-term support system

And “radical acceleration” (two grades or more) was even more “strongly discouraged.” Nevertheless, despite policy to the contrary, I was summarily advanced from Grade 3 to Grade 5. So much for guidelines and rules.

<sup>96</sup> “J'accuse!” (in English “I accuse!”) The title of an open letter published on January 13, 1898, in the newspaper *L'Aurore* by the French writer Émile Zola, addressed to the French President Félix Faure, accusing the government of anti-Semitism and the unlawful jailing of Alfred Dreyfus,

Here's what happened in my case: Testing was limited to one instrument only, administered on the very first day of school, with observation in total comprising one single ten-minute meeting with Principal Henderson. My parents were neither contacted nor consulted before the fact. Rather, my advancement was presented as *un fait accomplis*.

Moreover, alternative forms of acceleration, such as "subject-matter concentration," "combined (split) classes," "self-paced instruction," "curriculum compacting," "extra-curricular instruction," and "mentoring" (Southern and Jones, 2004, 5) were neither mentioned nor offered for consideration. Plus, there was no support system in place whatsoever, long-term or otherwise.

It would seem, therefore, that the decision to advance me was made in clear violation of EPSB policy. Granted, my parents did play a role. They could have perhaps pulled the plug on Henderson's Folly, but his arbitrary determination played on both their steadfast belief in Great Britain's historically innate superiority and their working-class deference to expert authority in such matters. Hence, I rather see my folks as willing dupes.

How then was something so contrary to established procedure be allowed to happen? Herbold (2004) highlights the tendency for administrators in institutional settings to carve out autonomous territory over time, and generally to the detriment of the organization. Valenti (1977), himself a high school principal, similarly decried the existence of such fiefdoms in the New York education system.

*In the early 20th century, educational elites saw themselves as expert social engineers who could perfect the nation by consciously directing the evolution of society. (Tayack & Cuban, 1996, 2)*

Henderson's tenure as Principal at Prince Albert Elementary extended over three decades, from 1949 to 1968. My guess is that, by the mid-1950s, he had come to regard the school as his own personal *demesne*. Granted, he may have been a prince, but he sure as hell weren't no pal.

*Put not thy trust in princes.*<sup>97</sup>

The game to play at Sutherland Junior High was basketball. Thankfully, its middle-school configuration presented an opportunity for me to participate. Though I was enrolled in Gr. 10, school administrators let me play on the Gr. 8 team (they weren't going to at first, but relented).

“Give me a fucking break for Christ's sake!” I pleaded (not really).

Basketball appealed to me — the running, the shooting, the scoring, the crowds, the cheering, and camaraderie of team competition.

*I love this game!*<sup>98</sup>

Michael Jordan, 1992

I practiced a lot (perhaps a bit too much), had a killer outside shot, and, being reasonably tall, competed well against others in my age-group. The team succeeded too, even winning the district championship. But kudos in Gr. 8 don't cut it in Gr. 10. My older classmates didn't care about what was going on with younger kids below them. There was no glory, no status bump, no prestige bonus with the girls.

And things were awkward with girls. Granted, the Gr. 8 ones my age were pretty

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<sup>97</sup> Psalm 146:3

<sup>98</sup> Major theme of a world-wide publicity campaign promoting the National Basketball Association 1992-99.

enough, but, from my lofty Gr. 10 perspective, they seemed childish and silly, and not much good for making out. Conversely, the older girls, while much more worldly and appealing, were having none of me. I was stuck between floors, neither downstairs with the younger kids, nor two flights up with the older ones.

*Well I'm too old for girls and I'm too young for women  
I've looked all around and my hopes are a dimmin'  
I feel like a fish not allowed any swimmin' . . .  
They call me Mr. In-between.*<sup>99</sup>

Burl Ives, 1962

My attendance at Sutherland Junior High is memorable for one more thing. It was the first time I ever played guitar on stage before a live audience. The instrument in question was an American-made arch-top electric model borrowed from our next-door neighbour.

Plugged directly into the gymnasium's P.A. system at a lunchtime student assembly.— it sounded terrible. The tune was the old Hoagy Carmichael chestnut “Heart and Soul.”<sup>100</sup> It was instrumental only (no singing), and lasted less than a minute or two. I don't remember hearing any boos.

<sup>99</sup> From “Mr. In-between,” song written by Harlan Howard, recorded by Burl Ives on Decca Records in 1962.

<sup>100</sup> Music by Hoagy Carmichael and lyrics by Frank Loesser, published in 1938.

## Premature Matriculation

From Sutherland I moved up to North Vancouver Senior Secondary (NVSS) which housed only grades eleven and twelve. Consequently, there was no Gr. 9 boys basketball team for me to play on (and no thirteen year-old girls to play with). There was, however, this one pretty seventeen year-old junior cheerleader, who, apparently, on the very first day of class, thought I was “kinda cute.” But later, at lunchtime, when informed by her girlfriends that I was in fact only fourteen (tall for my age) the poor child was so humiliated that she was driven to feign suicide by throwing herself in front of a slow-moving car.

*I kid you not.*<sup>101</sup>

Jack Paar, 1962

By every conventional measurement (good behaviour, good grades) things at school were okay. But having grown concerned about certain aspects of my social and psychological development (seems I’d grown somewhat sullen and morose) my Mum finally came on board, and we met with NVSS Principal Taylor to formally inquire regarding the prospects of my “de-acceleration.”

“It’s too late,” he said. “There’s been too long a headstart, and it would be unfair to the younger children.”

No deal. Case closed.

Most of my high school teachers were of the middling variety — capable enough, but dull. English literature comes to mind, with its mindless rote memorization

<sup>101</sup> Pet on-air phrase of Jack Harold Paar (1918-2004) host of NBC’s *Tonight Show* (1957-1962)



of poems by Bliss Carman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Hilaire Belloc, *et al.* Who were these people anyway? And why did they write like that? Fair questions in my view.

It was in Gr. 11 that it first dawned on me that my education wasn't making much sense. The information imparted seemed all out of context, a jumble of disjointed concepts and ideas, with no apparent application in the real world. Maths, for instance, with the introduction of calculus (sine functions, fractionals, and irrationals, etc) — all of a sudden seemed to turn weird. We did calculation after calculation after calculation, drawing curves on graph paper for hours and hours. Finally I cracked.

“With every respect Sir,” I said, genuinely not wishing to offend, “what are we actually going to do with all this information?” I wasn't trying to be difficult, just curious.

“Don't be impertinent!” he snapped. “Get back to work!”

*Why oh why oh why oh why?  
Oh why oh why oh why?  
Because, because, because because.  
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.<sup>102</sup>*

Woody Guthrie, 1960

The avuncular Mr. Benning was, literally, another story. Whether rattling on about the Battle of the Plains of Abraham, the Red River Rebellion, or the building of the CPR transcontinental railroad, his highly entertaining narrative teaching style brought Geography and History to life — the characters, the colours, the sounds, and smells etc.. It was the next best thing to being there, like

<sup>102</sup> Excerpt from “Why Oh Why,” song written by Woody Guthrie, recorded 1946-47, released on the 1960 Smithsonian-Folkways LP *This Land Is Your Land*.

watching a movie. Best of all, Mr. B didn't seem to mind taking dumb questions, so no one was afraid to stick their neck out and take chances.

*Dare to be stupid!*<sup>103</sup>

“Weird Al” Yankovich, 1985

And then there was the French instructor — Mademoiselle Binoche, a 1960s-era bohemian princess (think Carla Bruni-Sarkozy with long black hair, black sweater, black skirt, black tights, etc). I wasn't even taking French that year, but hung around her classroom anyway (during study block), just to look (and listen).

I was also struck by Euclidian geometry, in an almost spiritual way. The unshakable soundness of its theorems and corollaries seemed nothing short of Godly. Plus, it was graphic! That is, you could actually watch it at work: the lines, the shapes, the angles. I dug it all — every rhombus and dodecahedron. My geometry teacher, Mr. DiCimbriani, was clearly a smart man who loved his maths, but he had atrocious class management skills, and barely managed to keep his animals under control. I stayed out of trouble, however, and hardly ever got an answer wrong. One day, having reconciled a particularly puzzling Pythagorean paradox (an independent initiative, undertaken entirely on my own time), I was eager to share my epiphany. Getting to class early, I naively anticipated a positive response. But he just smugly tossed it off, as if to say, “Big deal . . . I did that in Gr. 5.” Indeed, he may well have, but that's not exactly the pedagogical point now — is it?

*I passed for a good teacher . . . because the rest in town were so bad.*<sup>104</sup>

Jean Jacques Rousseau, 1769

<sup>103</sup> Title song from the Weird Al Yankovich CD *Dare To Be Stupid*, released in 1985 on the Scotti Brothers label.

<sup>104</sup> From *Confessions of Jean-Jacques Rousseau* pt.1 bk 5 (written 1769, originally published 1782) Published by Project Gutenberg, 2004

Pop-music had always been a big part of my life. Even as a little kid in London, I'd liked listening to the radio, and had managed to develop a reasonably discerning appreciation for Rock & Roll — especially regarding to the electric guitar. We'd brought my cheap acoustic model over from England, and my Canadian uncle Walter had shown me a few chords (enough to play all the Hank Williams tunes he knew). And I'd taught myself how to play the Duane Eddy-style<sup>105</sup> solo on Johnny Horton's 1962 hit recording "Honky Tonk Man."

*Well I'm a honky tonk man and I can't seem to stop.  
I love to give the girls a whirl to the music of that old juke box,  
But when my money's all gone, I'm on the telephone, a singin'  
Hey hey mama, can your daddy come home.*

So when the Beatles came along in 1964 — I was ready.

I started off strumming alone in my room, learning all the tunes on their first album, like "She Loves You" and "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," but soon got bored playing with myself and went looking for other like-minded fools. Eventually we found each other, and started a hobby band, practicing after school and on weekends in a shed down by the waterfront at the foot of Lonsdale Avenue. We weren't any good, and no one would have considered actually paying us to play. No problem. We'd happily perform free of charge.

There was this neighborhood fellow, a hard-nosed guy who worked in the shipyard nearby. He'd stop by and listen to us practice, pretending to be interested in the music, but we all knew he was actually looking to get cozy with the bass player's mother — a 30-something single-parent.

"I can get them a Saturday afternoon spot," he boasted, "downtown."

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<sup>105</sup> New York-born electric guitarist Duane Eddy (b. 1938), known for his "twangy" sound.

Vancouver's Downtown Eastside back then wasn't quite the sordid scene it is today — merely seedy. The New Delhi Cabaret (pronounced “del-high”) was one of several adult-oriented joints near Hastings Street and Main catering to the rough and ready. Being teenagers, we were far too young to play an evening set. Our top-forty cover tunes were strictly teenybopper fare (they liked their R&B). Plus, like I said, we weren't really any good. But five o'clock on a weekend afternoon? No problem.

The bass player's mom and her boyfriend drove us there in his Cadillac *coupé* (none of us had licenses yet). The flashy neon-lit marquee read:

*Tonite! From Detroit! The Fabulous . . . Miss Lottie the Body!*

We set up and rattled through a thirty minute set, then quickly tore down and left the stage. Again, I don't recall hearing any boos. But that was probably because the five drunk loggers and three sloshed fishermen in the audience were passed out in their padded naugahide<sup>106</sup> booths, resting up before the evening show.

The backstage hallway was dark and, instead of turning right, I inadvertently turned the wrong way. Seeing a dressing-room door, and thinking it was ours, I opened it. There, surrounded by floor-length mirrors, in all her garmentless glory, stood “the Body,” busily getting her tear-away ball gown in shape for curtain call. Lottie was an “ecdysiast,”<sup>107</sup> and one of the best around.

*ecdysis n. pl. ecdyses: The shedding of an outer integument or layer of skin, as by insects, crustaceans and snakes.*

<sup>106</sup> A brand of artificial leather, developed in 1936 by Unriroyal Engineering Products of Naugatuck, Connecticut.

<sup>107</sup> Ecdysiast or “stripper.” Term first coined by H.L. Mencken in 1940.

“What you lookin’ at?!” she shrieked in mock horror. “Ain’t you never seen a naked lady before?”

I froze.

“Get out front there with all those other preverts,” (sic) she said, at first sternly, but then giving it a playful wink. “Now shoosh!”

I shooshed alright, all the way out the door, into the car, and back to North Vancouver, where my mum had dinner waiting.

“What did you and your friends do today dear?” she inquired.

“Oh nothing,” I said. “Just hanging out.”

My favourite thing to do in junior high-school, my primary mode of creative expression (besides strumming the guitar), had always been playing basketball. But now I was in senior high, with no junior grades below. Consequently, with no younger team to play on, my varsity career was instantly over — *kaput!* It felt like my arms and legs had been amputated.

*Basketball Jones, oh yeah, I got a basketball Jones.*<sup>108</sup>

Tyrone Shoelaces,<sup>109</sup> 1973

Suffering severe withdrawal, and forced to feed my addiction outside school, I began hanging out at the nearby North Vancouver Recreational Centre (NVRC) shooting hoops endlessly, hour after hour, as if in a sort of trance. But I wasn’t

<sup>108</sup> Song lyric, from “Basketball Jones,” released on the 1973 Cheech & Chong comedy LP *Los Cochinos*, on Ode/Warner Bros Records, produced by Lou Adler.

<sup>109</sup> Pseudonym of Canadian guitarist-songwriter Gaye Delorme.

the only gym-rat looking to score a quick fix. There was this other similarly afflicted geek, Pat Donahue, an Irish Catholic kid who'd transferred into the secular school system after becoming disenchanted with the ecclesiastical strain. We played "one-on-one," "horse," and "10-cents a shot" from the foul-line (double or nothing from centre-court). I believe he still owes me \$1000.

Every week, the NVRC would host a Senior Men's League basketball game, with teams sponsored by local businesses. The Harlem Nocturne was Vancouver's premier black-owned R&B nightclub, and proprietor Ernie King was the bankroll behind the city's only all-black team (naturally named the Nocturnes). The NVRC, situated two blocks from where I lived with my family, was their home-court. I was their biggest fan, and rarely missed a game.

Comprising a mixture of local blacks and visiting African-American "cousins" (typically from Seattle), the Nocturnes' pre-game routines were performed Globetrotter-style to the latest R&B hits blaring loudly from a portable record player. The combination of heavy 4/4 backbeat and improvised athletic interplay was intoxicating. Fast and fabulous, they won more often than not, and in 1962 became Provincial Champions. Their undisputed leader was player-coach John Braithwaite.

*Growing up in downtown Toronto in the 1930s and 1940s, John Bismarck Braithwaite used to go to St. Christopher Settlement House to meet up with friends and shoot hoops, maybe play a game of pool - just the kinds of things boys do with their free hours.*

*Later, while attending the University of Toronto, he became the first black player on the UofT Varsity Blues basketball team. His own teammates and fans were supportive, but others unfortunately were less so, especially south of the border.*

*“I was called all kinds of names, couldn’t sleep in the same hotel with my team, and had to eat separately.” (Eston, 2006)*

*Upon receiving his Master of Social Work Degree in 1956, John accepted an invitation to work at Neighbourhood House in North Vancouver. At age twenty-seven he became its first black executive director, and over the next two decades built it into a strong, multifaceted neighborhood centre.*

*“We were into affordable housing, inner city recreation, youth outreach, social action, Aboriginal social services . . . you name it.” (Ibid.)*

*A North Vancouver resident for 47 years, he ran nine times for City Councilor, topping the polls each time, and retiring in 2002. (North Vancouver, 2003)*

Though in grade eleven, I was still only fourteen years-old — too young to attend the R&B dances held every weekend in the very same NVRC gymnasium.

Targeting older teens and young adults, they featured the city’s sharpest and best-known bands. Undaunted, I’d just pedal over on my bike, sit outside on the back-door stairs — and listen.

Vancouver’s indigenous style of R&B c.1963 was closely related to the Seattle Sound (known today as the Pacific Northwest Sound),<sup>110</sup> led by bands like the Dave Lewis Combo, the Viceroyes, the Wailers (with Rockin’ Robin Roberts and Gail Harris), and the Kingsmen of “Louie Louie” fame, from Portland, Oregon.

The typical Vancouver “grease-band”<sup>111</sup> lineup featured a local black singer backed by a white band (a mixed-race hybrid in the Memphis mode). For instance, Jayson Hoover sang with the Epics, Kentish Steele fronted the Shantelles, and Rosalind Keene was backed by her Appolloes. Similarly, the Spectres played behind Donnie Gerard, and Carl Graves sang with Soul

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<sup>110</sup> See [www.pnwb.com](http://www.pnwb.com).

<sup>111</sup> An inter-generational perjorative referring to older R&B musicians’ out-dated 1950s-era hairstyles.

Unlimited. Other combos featured Billy Dixon, Ron Small and the Collins Brothers. The really big band on the block, however, was the Night Train Revue: a massive brass-laden consortium led by organist Chuck Cliff, and fronted by the dynamic trio of Sy Risby, Tony Harris, and Chuck Flintroy.

Little Daddy and the Bachelors featuring Tommy Chong on guitar (later to gain brief notoriety as Four N\*\*\*\*\*s & a C\*\*\*k) had a somewhat different look.<sup>112</sup> I fondly recall attending my very first after-school, teen-age sock-hop in the NVSS cafeteria, and being impressed by Tommy's rudimentary but deeply groove-oriented rhythm guitar playing.

There were all-white grease-bands as well, but they too leaned towards an R&B sound. Prominent among these were the CFUN Classics (sponsored by a Kitsilano-based radio station) featuring future Motown Records producer Tom Baird<sup>113</sup> on keyboards.

The teenybopper set was infatuated with anything remotely British, and tended to look upon the R&B inspired grease-bands as old-fashioned. But some (myself included), having feasted well on the Fab Four and their Liverpool ilk, had come to appreciate the music of the London-based Rolling Stones, whose records, while still fashionably Anglo, invoked a sexy-primitive African American R&B feel. Other Brit-pop groups were also beginning to mine the blues vein, such as Ireland's Them (featuring Van Morrison), and The Yardbirds (featuring *über*-lead guitarists Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck).

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<sup>112</sup> Aka: Three Coloured Fellows and a Chinese Lad — the name of the houseband at The Elegant Parlour ca. 1967, situated in the basement of the Reninal Circus nightclub (formerly the Embassy Ballroom), on Davie Street at Burrard in Vancouver. When posted on club's marquee, the band's name caused a media furor. In 1968, performing as Bobby Taylor and the Vancouvers, they had a U.S. top-forty hit with "Does Your Mama Know about Me," on Motown Records

<sup>113</sup> Producer of hits by Rare Earth 1970-71 (preceding Norman Whitfield), Baird mysteriously disappeared in 1972 while sailing his yacht near Santa Cataline Island off the coast of Southern California.



The mid-1960s “hootenanny” craze had spawned a folk-music club at school, where earnest preppies would at lunchtime strum and sing along to songs by the New Christy Minstrels,<sup>114</sup> the Kingston Trio,<sup>115</sup> and the Highwaymen.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, it was baby-faced folksinger Bob Dylan who, in 1964, first introduced me to “the blues” (or helped me put a name to it). The song in question was “Freight Train Blues” from Dylan’s eponymous 1962 debut LP, recorded at Columbia Studios in New York, produced by John Hammond Sr.

*The use of locomotive imagery to symbolize escape was a common feature of early blues lyrics. Typically, a black man’s need to “ramble on” might stem from lack of opportunity, oppressive working conditions, the long arm of the law, or a love affair gone astray. (Baker Jr., 1987)*

*Railroad imagery in the blues can also be expressed instrumentally “by the onomatopoeia of the train’s whistle sounded on the indrawn breath of a harmonica, a train’s bell tinkled on the high keys of an upright piano,” or the rhythmic “clickety-clack” of drumsticks on a metal cymbal stand. (Ibid, 4-8)*

*Carby (1991, 751) counters from a feminist perspective, pointing out (a) the inherent phallic connotation of locomotive imagery, and (b) that train travel “had distinctively different meanings for black men and women . . . migration for women often meant being left behind . . . there was also an explicit recognition that journeys made by women held particular dangers.”*

Pop-music notwithstanding, I still had to go to school everyday, and it was never fun. In 1964, with the Summer of Love still several years away, North Van Senior Secondary was ruled by a testy coalition of preppie “hershey bars”<sup>117</sup> and

<sup>114</sup> Formed by singer/guitarist Randy Sparks in 1961, the group had several folk music hits, on Columbia Records, including “This Land Is Your Land,” and “Green, Green.”

<sup>115</sup> Formed in San Francisco in 1957 by Bob Shane, Dave Guard, and Nick Reynolds.

<sup>116</sup> The Highwaymen were a ca.1960 collegiate-folk group, which originated at Wesleyan University, Middletown, CT. The groups’ original members were David Fisher, Steve Trott, Chan Daniels, Steve Butts and Bob Burnett.

<sup>117</sup> A term of derision among North Vancouver working class kids in the 1960s, referring to upper-middle class kids with the “preppy surfer dude” look.

car-crazy “greaseballs,” with each group locked in three-way Mexican standoff with the local Squamish Indians.<sup>118</sup>

Consequently, for an unaffiliated interloper like me, some parts of the school were best left unexplored. One afternoon, on an upper floor in a remote wing of the building, I found myself the target of amusement for a particularly gruesome bunch of preppie boneheads (I don’t recall what school-related business might have taken me there).

“Who are you?” bellowed their leader, an annoyingly handsome senior dressed in powder blue chinos, brown penny-loafers with white socks, and a short-sleeved madras-plaid sportshirt. “Are you lost?”

“Yeah!” piped an associate, “Do you have an appointment?”

“No,” I said, barely managing a squeak.

“Well then,” said the leader, poking his finger in my concave chest, “you’re trespassing, and you know what that means — right?”

Message received. Loud and clear. Then, just as the ghastly ritual was about to commence — the door to an adjacent washroom swung open venting a cloud of blue smoke. Out from the mist, a mysterious dark figure materialized wearing hyper stylish garb — tight dress pants, pointed shoes, white tab-collar shirt, and a trendy grey-black, half-belted overcoat. It was Frank Baker, Head Indian. Known throughout the school as “Chief,” Frank was a tough yet charismatic character.

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<sup>118</sup> Squamish First Nations students at NVSS were primarily from the Mission Reserve (#6) located on the North Shore waterfront, at the mouth of Mosquito Creek.

“Keep it down for Christ’s sake!” he muttered. “Can’t a guy have a fucking cigarette in peace?”

Duly chastened, the evil quorum released me from their unctuous grip and slithered away in slimy obeisance. Baker then similarly withdrew to the comfort of his private smoking parlour. He’d saved my bacon for sure, and for that I was grateful.

It was May 1965. I was still only fifteen, and school was coming to an end — not just for the year, but forever. With Gr. 12 final exams looming, then graduation, it was time to study and hopefully perform well. At the same time, however, I’d been given an opportunity to play music for real money at Frank’s Cabaret, a sleazy clip-joint downtown (three sets and a floor show for \$5 a night and a free spaghetti dinner).

The band was led by a 30-something greaser with a massive red pompadour hairdo. Dressed in an ill-fitting powder-blue tuxedo with a frilly-front white dress-shirt, he played a brand-new red Fender Stratocaster. We did all the standard Rockabilly and R&B tunes, like “Memphis, Tennessee,” “Mustang Sally,” and “Long Tall Texan.”

The floor-show was M.C.’d by Teddy Felton, a diminutive old-school black “song and dance man” sporting white tie and tails, and a silver-tipped ebony walking cane. He typically opened with “Hello Dolly” and close to his theme song “Bye Bye Blackbird.” The show itself usually comprised the club’s burly Italian chef playing “La Paloma” on the accordion, an overweight amateur belly dancer named Bubbles, and Rockin’ Rollie, a black longshoreman from Halifax hawking a novelty saxophone act.

Whenever the police raided the place looking for illicit booze and underage patrons (which they often did), the juke box would flash an early warning signal. Naturally, being only fifteen, I'd have to sneak outside and wait on the fire-escape stairs until the coast was clear. Then I'd rejoin the boys on the bandstand and pick up the beat as if nothing had happened. The job was easy enough — just show up on time, strum along, and keep your eyes open for trouble.

There was one problem, however— it was on weekday school nights. So, I'd have to watch the clock and quit early to catch the 10:30 o'clock bus back to North Vancouver, which left from in front of the Hudson's Bay Department Store on the corner of Granville Street and Georgia. My parents thought I'd been studying late at the library, which did in fact stay open until 10:00pm during final exams. My marks were always decent, so the alibi held up.

## Circus World

Final exams went reasonably well, despite my having neglected to study. Matriculating with honours (2nd Class), I went to the graduation ceremony, but not to the prom (wasn't invited). Yes, Henderson's Folly had come full circle, and bit me in the ass! Believe me, I'd sue the bastard — if he weren't already dead.

Just turned sixteen and out of school — I had to find a job. Nothing in the Vancouver Sun's classified section appealed. Everything seemed to involve hard manual labour, like entry-level construction or light industrial work. Then one day, I noticed something different.

### WANTED: MAGICIAN'S ASSISTANT

no experience necessary

**must be willing to travel**

Bill and Noreen Bester were a long-married couple of retired schoolteachers from Saskatchewan who during the summer months would take their amateur magic act on the road, performing at exhibitions and fairs in small towns throughout Western Canada.

I answered their advertisement by letter. Doubtless impressed by my penmanship, they agreed to take me on. We rendezvoused in Williams Lake, a ten-hour Greyhound bus ride north of Vancouver, at the annual Rodeo and Stampede.

“I've been doing magic all my life,” said Bill, “and don't plan on stopping any time soon.”

They traveled between small towns in their brand-new Mercury Montclair station-wagon stuffed full of magic gear, pulling a trailer. Typically, they'd stay at a fairground for a week at a time, along with the other carnival workers and performers in a hastily assembled village of mobile homes and tents.

In warm weather I slept under the Tilt-a-Whirl ride,<sup>119</sup> doubling as overnight watchman. Cooler nights found me in the car's roomy back seat. Typically, we'd rehearse before lunch, and do three 40-minute shows a day. Bill's repertoire was pretty standard: some prestidigitation (hand magic), some store-bought illusions (like *Zig-Zag*<sup>120</sup> and *Metamorphosis*),<sup>121</sup> and some Kreskin-style<sup>122</sup> mentalism. Noreen was his lovely on-stage assistant, and I was his trusty backstage hand.

The deal was this — in order to be of genuine assistance, he'd have to reveal to me how certain tricks were done. Naturally, I was sworn to eternal silence (something I honour to this day). But there was a downside. Having been made privy to the mechanics of magic, the mystery would be gone, along with one's childlike sense of amazement.

“Are you sure you want to know the secret?” inquired Bill, “Cos once you do, you'll never be the same. It's like finding out there's no Santa Claus, only worse.”

<sup>119</sup> The *Tilt A Whirl* ride was invented in 1926 by Herbert Sellner, a woodworker and maker of water slides from Faribault, Minnesota. A platform-type “flat ride, it debuted at the Minnesota State Fair in 1927. The earliest models were constructed of wood, powered by a gas motor, and featured nine cars. Today they are constructed of steel, aluminum and fiberglass, and have seven cars, each powered by its own separate electric motor.

<sup>120</sup> *Zig-Zag Girl* is an illusion wherein a magician appears to divide his or her assistant into thirds, only to have the assistant emerge from the illusion at the end of the performance completely unharmed. Since its invention in the mid-1960s by Robert Harbin, it has been hailed as one of the greatest illusions ever invented due to both the apparent impossibility of the trick, and the fact that unlike many illusions it can be performed when surrounded by curious spectators.

<sup>121</sup> *Metamorphosis* is a stage illusion invented by John Nevil Maskelyne, but most often associated with famous escape artist Harry Houdini. It is also known amongst magicians as the Substitution Trunk. In the illusion, an assistant is locked inside a large box or trunk, often after being restrained with handcuffs, ropes, bags, etc. The magician then stands upon the trunk and holds a curtain up to momentarily conceal his entire body. When the curtain is lowered, the assistant is seen standing atop the box, the magician and assistant having changed places instantaneously. When the box is opened, it is shown to contain the magician, restrained as the assistant had been.

<sup>122</sup> Born George Joseph Kresge, Jr. (1935) in Montclair, NJ. A veteran stage performer, better known as The Amazing Kreskin.

Between performances, to vary the routine, I'd wander the midway getting to know the carnies and their various hustles. One particularly hot evening around 11:00pm, masked by the general cacophony, I thought I heard the sound of live music. There was no moon that night, and the northern sky was coal black. Following my ear, I honed in on the source — a large oblong canvas pavilion, pulsating away on the outskirts of tent-town.

The brightly lit entranceway was guarded by two large gents in shiny suits. The marquee shouted: "Live from Detroit! Miss Lottie the Body!" A slightly smaller sign below read "Adults Only." Despite my youthful appearance, the bouncers (casual midway acquaintances of mine) winked me through.

"Don't forget!" one reminded. "You're underage.<sup>123</sup> Go over and sit by the band. If the cops show up, grab an instrument and pretend you're one of them."

Not unfamiliar with the concept, I parked myself directly behind the drummer, figuring it a decent place to hide should something awkward happen. The place was jammed (men only, of course), with all eyes focussed on the stage down at one end. The house lights eventually dimmed, and twin spotlights cut the smoke filled air. The band, a 4-piece R&B outfit, fell into low-down groove, grinding out a steamy "Night Train."<sup>124</sup> The supporting cast then came on — six young women (four black, two white), parading enticingly back and forth across the stage, each exotically turbaned and wrapped in a long satin cape to conceal her wares. The barker, charged with pumping up the testosterone fueled throng, lasciviously extolled their individual and collective attributes.

The ladies finally got down to serious business, doffing their outer-garments and

<sup>123</sup> The legal age of majority in B.C. ca. 1965 was 21.

<sup>124</sup> A "twelve bar blues" instrumental standard first recorded by Jimmy Forrest on United Records in 1951, popularized in the early 1960s by James Brown. .

giving it the full-on hootchie-coo. With the MC's encouragement, the band smoothly picked up the beat, sliding into a bouncy "Satin Doll."<sup>125</sup> Several tunes later, with crowd all warmed up, "the Body" herself came on.

Lottie was special. Much better than the rest. This lady could really dance.

*"She was built like a double order of pancakes - sweet and stacked. The only light in the room bathed her as she emerged from a thick velvet curtain, incandescent, platinum hair piled high on her head. As the band struck up a slow, seductive wail, her intricately beaded gown glimmered with each step. By the end of the tune, the dress was gone, and she wore little more than heels, a few strategically placed rhinestones, and a smile." (Klein, 2005)*

*Born in Brooklyn, NY, and raised in Syracuse, Lottie "the Body" Graves began her dance training in the late 1930s at the age of 14, first performing with a troupe called the New York Lindy Hoppers. Trained in the Katherine Dunham<sup>126</sup> technique of modern and Afro-Cuban dance, she was also heavily influenced by the great Josephine Baker.<sup>127</sup> (Ibid.)*

*Often billed as "Detroit's answer to Gypsy Rose Lee"<sup>128</sup> she is quick to remind that she was "not just a stripper or shake dancer." Indeed, reviewers have routinely lauded her exceptional grace, sophistication and elegance. During her lengthy career, Lotti performed with the almost the entire Black showbiz pantheon, from Billy Eckstine, Della Reese, Harry Belafonte, Billie Holiday, to Aretha Franklin and Redd Foxx. She worked throughout the U.S. and Canada, as well as in Britain, Spain, Cuba, West Africa, and Japan. She has been retired for the past 30 years, and presently lives in Florida (Michigan Chronicle, 1992)*

<sup>125</sup> *Satin Doll* is a popular jazz standard, written in 1953 by Duke Ellington and Billy Strayhorn with lyrics by Johnny Mercer .

<sup>126</sup> Katherine Mary Dunham (1909-2006) was an American dancer, choreographer, songwriter, author, educator and activist. Trained as an anthropologist at University of Chicago, Dunham had one of the most successful careers in American and European theater of the 20th century and has been called the "Matriarch and Queen Mother of Black Dance".

<sup>127</sup> Alternately known as the "Bronze Venus," the "Black Pearl", and the "Créole Goddess" - Josephine Baker (1906-1975) was an African American expatriate entertainer and actress, particularly popular in France, where she became a citizen in 1937. She was the first African American female to star in a major motion picture, to integrate an American concert hall, and to become a world-famous entertainer.

<sup>128</sup> Born Rose Louise Hovick in Seattle, Washington in 1911, Gypsy Rose Lee was an American burlesque entertainer, famous for her striptease act. She was also an actress and writer, whose 1957 memoir, written as a monument to her mother, was made into the stage musical and film *Gypsy*. She died in 1970.



*Becki Ross (2005, abstract) addresses “ways in which white women and women of colour were differentially located within local and trans-national circuits of erotic entertainment.” Hazel Carby (1991, 333) credits the development of blues music and blues culture for enabling black women like Lottie “to manipulate and control their construction as sexual objects.” Michelle Russell (1982, 130) similarly credits blues music for “enabling black women to confiscate and reconstruct their identities.”*

*“Blues women occupied a privileged space; they had broken out of the boundaries of the home and taken their sensuality and sexuality out of the private into the public sphere. Their physical presence was a crucial aspect of their power . . . spangled dresses, furs, gold, diamonds . . . all the sumptuous and desirable aspects of their body reclaimed from being an objectification of male desire to being a representation of female desire.” (Carby, 1991,75)*

The tent was stinking hot inside, and literally dripping with raw sexual tension. Then, right in the middle of Lottie’s performance, the RCMP arrived (as if on cue), checking IDs for horny teenagers and searching for concealed liquor.

“Over here kid,” beckoned the guitar player, handing me his spare instrument. “Hold this and act like you know what you’re doing.”

The police hung around for a while, but eventually left, and the band started up again. Noticing me noodling away with some vague dexterity, the guitar-man pointed to his amplifier and said “plug in there.” And so I did, jamming along to “Granny’s Pad” by the Viceroyes (a Seattle R&B group). I thought it went fairly well (again, no boos).

Based in Vancouver, the band members were in their early thirties, several musical generations ahead of me, and steeped in the local R&B tradition. They called themselves the Hepcats — four sharp-dressed city dudes, backing up

strippers on the summer rodeo circuit, trying to put a few dollars away. I was just a suburban teenager, more in tune with after school sock-hops and tunes by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Who. Nevertheless, a few days later, the drummer floated an intriguing proposition.

Apparently, the guitar player was having some trouble at home. His pregnant wife desperately wanted him to come in off the road right away and — seeing as I was already here and — seeing as I sort of knew how to play guitar — the band was wondering if I might perhaps be able to fill in (at a reduced entry-level rate, of course). It was a win-win proposition if I ever heard one. What clinched the deal was that I'd actually thought to bring a guitar along to keep me company, a Japanese made Peerless brand electric, which my dad had bought from a pawnshop at Main Street and Cordova for \$15 (lessons not included).

Learning how to play? That I had to figure out for myself.

Always a kindly gent, Bill Bester offered to lend me his PA system to use as an *ad hoc* guitar amplifier, so I drew double pay for several weeks, even managing to save a bit. Then, like all good things, the season came to an end. The Besters returned to Wascana, the Hepcats drove back down to the coast, and I traveled home alone by Greyhound bus.

## My Home Town

I learned two important things from the Besters: (1) there's no such thing as magic, and (2) things are never what they seem. Back home, the magic was gone from my parents' marriage, and the future seemed pretty bleak. Forced to choose between being a sixteen year-old university<sup>129</sup> student or getting a full time job, I chose the latter.

*Guess if you can. Choose if you dare.*<sup>130</sup>

Pierre Corneille, 1646

I rechecked the want-ads in the newspaper. Again, nothing appealed. So, I settled for a job as a bin-jockey at an automotive warehouse in North Burnaby, filling orders for \$190 per month. The work entailed matching numbers to parts and packaging them for pickup or shipment. The tedium was excruciating, remedied only by listening to top-forty radio, and especially blues-based Rock & Roll records like "I'm A Man"<sup>131</sup> by the English group The Yardbirds, which just happened to be blaring loudly when a young delivery-van driver came by one afternoon to pickup an order of widgets.

"Great tune!" he said.

"No kidding!" I replied.

We bonded immediately, united in our appreciation for that peculiar musical

<sup>129</sup> The University of British Columbia (UBC) was the only local option in 1966, Simon Fraser University across town was then not yet in operation.

<sup>130</sup> *Heraclius* (1646) Act IV, sc. iv.

<sup>131</sup> Written in 1954 by Bo Diddley (Elias McDaniel), re-recorded in 1955 as "Mannish Boy" by Muddy Waters on Chess Records.

quality to which we were both drawn (we weren't sure what to call it, but we liked it). His name was Dave Williams and, like me, was just freshly graduated from high school. Unlike me, however, he was a fully gestated eighteen and a half years-old.

“I play drums in a band,” he said. “We’re playing this weekend at the community centre in North Van. Do you know it?”

“I live two blocks away. See you there.”

I showed up for their Friday night show with my trusty \$5 Höhner harmonica. To be honest, I only had two “blues harp” licks in my repertoire. But nobody else had any, so two was more than enough. Invited to sit in on “2120 South Michigan Avenue”<sup>132</sup> by the Rolling Stones, I couldn't help but notice that the audience's highly positive response seemed oddly disproportionate to the dodgy quality of my performance.

*Strange how potent cheap music is.*<sup>133</sup>

Noel Coward, 1930

Later, after the show, I chatted with the band. Apparently, their rhythm guitarist was leaving, and they were wondering if I might be interested in perhaps, you know — joining.

“When do we start?!” I said. “Let's rock!”

<sup>132</sup> *2120 South Michigan Avenue* is an R&B instrumental by The Rolling Stones, released in 1964 on the British EP *Five by Five*, and the US LP12 X 5 (their second). Composer credit goes to Nanker Phelge, the group's collective pseudonym. The title refers to the address of the offices and recording studios of Chess Records in Chicago, Illinois, where the tune was recorded.

<sup>133</sup> From “Private Lives” (1930) Act 1.

They called themselves William Tell & the Marksmen,<sup>134</sup> and played all the latest pop hits. They even had a manager — a slightly older (20-something) English expat named Jim Scott. The first teen dance I played with them, at a roller rink near Cultus Lake, paid \$17 — way more than at Frank’s Cabaret downtown. It was great fun. Plus, at sixteen years of age, I very much liked the idea of performing at high school dances, where only just recently, as an underage loser-geek, I’d been socially invisible.

*I want my status back, baby!*<sup>135</sup>

Frank Zappa, 1967

Things quickly started to heat up. First, the lead-guitar player resigned leaving me to claim his position. I was game, but my guitar and amplifier were hopelessly substandard for the job (ie: crap). But then, as if by magic, band manager Scott struck a sponsorship deal with local musical instrument retailer Bob Tartini, whose New Westminster store was one of the largest in the region.

Instantly, we went from frogs to teenage princes! One moment I’m playing on a piece of throwaway Japanese firewood,<sup>136</sup> and the next minute I have not one but three expensive American-made Fender<sup>137</sup> guitars — a metallic red Jazzmaster, a sunburst Telecaster, and a nifty 12-string electric. In addition, I received a brand-new Fender Bandmaster amplifier with two matching speaker cabinets, and a Super Reverb combo. Talk about controlling “the means of production!”

<sup>134</sup> See <<http://pnwbands.com/williamtell.html>> Band members are Lindsay Mitchell, Geoff Edington, Dave Wilson, Morris Hillen, and Bill Dunlop.

<sup>135</sup> *Status Back Baby*, song written by Frank Zappa, recorded by the Mothers of Invention on the 1967 Verve LP *Absolutely Free*.

<sup>136</sup> Japanese musical products, having not yet achieved contemporary levels of manufacturing excellence, were considered inferior to American-made instruments.

<sup>137</sup> The Fender Guitar Company, founded in 1946 in Fullerton, California, by Clarence Leonides “Leo” Fender (1909-1991), is the premier manufacturer of electric guitars in the world today, and perhaps most associated with its iconic “Stratocaster” model. Fender was purchased by the CBS Corporation in 1967. Instruments made prior to this date are thus deemed more collectible, and of higher monetary value.

*Karl Marx (1848) maintains that power adheres best to those who control “the means of production,” further distinguishing between (a) instruments of labour (tools, factories, infrastructure, etc.) and (b) subjects of labour (natural resources and raw materials). Accordingly, people operate on the subject of labour, using the instruments of labour, to create a product. (Evans, 1975, 63)*

*Engels suggests that using tools implies a “reciprocity” (ruckwirkung) between the human individual and nature. (Marx & Engels, 1845; in Cohen 1995, 33) A musical instrument is thus seen as the material medium through which a musician’s creative inspiration enters the world. The more effective the tool, the higher likelihood of doing a decent job. Hence, a good way to understand how an occupational community functions might be to think about the kinds of tools it employs, how they are acquired, and the value placed upon them.*

My parents were on the verge of separating, and the atmosphere at home was downright rancorous. So, I just checked out — moving into a basement room at school chum Dale Austin’s house. A charismatic loner, Dale lived with his parents and two sisters in Lower Lonsdale Avenue, tucked between the Squamish Indian reserve and the docks. My Mum didn’t much care for Dale’s mother, excoriating her for taking me in. “That horrible woman!” she’d say. But Mrs. Austin, bless her heart, saved my sanity.

Sixteen years-old and living away from home? Seemed like the sensible thing to do at the time. Some kids might have been a tad disquieted. I sure was. But at least I had a band. Something tangible to identify with.

The Marksmen were what you’d call a pre-psychedelic west-coast rock group, very much in the British Invasion mode, but still geographically beholden to its Seattle Sound R&B roots. The main idea back then was to try and duplicate the record on the radio, and note for note if possible. Improvisation, for us, hadn’t

been invented yet. But we weren't looking to alter the tunes. We just wanted to get them right, and then keep doing them exactly the same way — over and over and over again.

But the Summer of Love was afoot. And the times? They were a changin'.

I vividly recall in early 1966 going to see Bob Dylan perform with the Band, at the then new PNE Agrodome. The acoustics, as now, were ridiculous. Bob did a solo acoustic opening set — just him, a Martin D-28 guitar,<sup>138</sup> and a rack-harmonica. The show was riveting (even if it did sound like shit). The sight of Dylan's white-haired *über*-manager Albert Grossman, pacing back and forth in a huff at the edge of the crowd, hurling curses at the substandard PA system — was priceless.

“Settle down Al,” chided Bob on the microphone. “You're gonna hurt yourself.”

Folk-icon Dylan broke for intermission, and then brought on The Band. But they weren't called The Band yet. Rather, because they'd only just recently been working in Toronto with expat Arkansas Rockabilly veteran Ronnie Hawkins, they were still known as The Hawks. Lead-guitarist Robbie Robertson,<sup>139</sup> wearing a pink crushed-velvet suit, and playing a white Fender Telecaster<sup>140</sup> (not unlike my own), was magnificent.

Some audience members, however, were less than impressed, instead choosing to

<sup>138</sup> The C.F. Martin & Company is a US guitar manufacturer, founded in 1833 by Christian Frederick Martin. Highly regarded for its steel-string guitars, it is a leading mass manufacturer of flattop acoustics, with models that retail for thousands of dollars and vintage instruments that often fetch six figures at resale. The company's headquarters and primary factory are located in Nazareth, PA.

<sup>139</sup> Toronto-born Jaime Royal Klegerman (b. 1943) is a Mohawk from the Six-Nations Grand River Reserve.

<sup>140</sup> Designed in 1949 by Leo Fender, essentially a two-pickup version of the Fender Esquire, it originally sold under the name “Broadcaster.” Renamed Telecaster in 1951 following a copyright dispute with Gretsch Drums, it was Fender's first mass produced model.

walk out in protest over Dylan's decision to incorporate electric instruments into his act.

“Traitor!” they shouted, retreating up the aisle in anger — one purist malcontent emphasizing his displeasure by turning around and shaking his fist at the stage. It was all rather silly, and, along with others in the audience, I booed them soundly on their way out. But they were right about one thing — Bob the folksinger was great! Bob the rock-star, however, was just as good — even better. The best of both worlds, as far as I could tell.

What really turned things around for me that night was Garth Hudson's improvised Lowry organ solo on “Ballad of a Thin Man.”<sup>141</sup> He started slowly, building gradually, but then really started to pour it on, eventually taking several choruses (not just one, like on the original recording).<sup>142</sup> It was spontaneously conceived, and completely different. I didn't know musicians were allowed to do that, or that it could be so much fun.

Meanwhile, William Tell and the Marksmen were doing well on the local teenage music scene. So well, in fact, that we'd come to the attention of the Musicians' Union (AF of M, Local 145). I remember paying the \$20 sign-up fee and receiving my membership card in the mail.

*Labour, as an organized movement, began in Europe during the industrial revolution, when agricultural jobs declined and employment moved to urban areas. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw major gains stemming from Pope Leo XIII's 1891 foundational document, Rerum Novarum, also known as On the Condition of the Working Classes, which advocated reforms including limits on the length of the work day, a living wage, the elimination of child labor, the rights of labor to organize, and the*

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<sup>141</sup> On the 1965 Bob Dylan Columbia Records LP *Highway 61 Revisited*.

<sup>142</sup> The original studio recording featured New York studio musician Al Kooper on Hammond organ.



*duty of the state to regulate labor conditions. The movement subsequently flourished, first in Europe and later in North America. (St. James, 2003)*

*Founded in Columbus, Ohio in 1886 by Samuel Gompers, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) was one of the first “umbrella” labour unions in the United States, and the largest such conglomerate in the U.S. during the first half of the twentieth century. The AFL pursued a conservative line, its most pressing concerns being working conditions, pay and control over jobs. Political activity was deemed secondary. (Currarino, 2006)*

*Nevertheless, by sanctioning the creation of entirely separate black locals within its affiliates, particularly in the construction and railroad industries, black workers were effectively excluded from full AFL membership. The AFL also actively supported legislation, such as literacy tests, targeting unskilled immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.*

*AFL hegemony nationwide was accomplished by advancing funds, providing organizers, and otherwise strengthening loyal affiliates, notably the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Teamsters, and the American Federation of Musicians. (Ibid.)*

Showing a Vancouver Musicians’ Association card at the door in 1967 might have gained free entry to a few select adult nightclubs around town. And with it you could work a CBC show (strictly a union shop), or perform with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. Other than that, however, it wasn’t worth very much at all, as gigs for young rock bands were typically uncontracted, and the pay usually well below union scale (especially after factoring in production and transportation expenses). Plus, being mere teenagers, the union’s pension plan was for us a far, far distant consideration. Nevertheless, membership left me feeling every bit the professional that I’d always wanted to be.

Joining the union coincided with a major technical advancement in my guitar playing. High school pal Pete Foster (a fellow Brit-rock enthusiast), had just returned from a six-month pilgrimage to “Swinging London,” bearing two

seminal recordings by English bandleader John Mayall: *The Bluesbreakers* with Eric Clapton (1966), and *Hard Road* featuring Peter Green (1967).

I'd never heard anything like it — not by the Beatles, the Stones, or any other rock group (except maybe the Yardbirds with *über* guitarman Jeff Beck). I mean, these guys could really play.<sup>143</sup>

Clapton's performance was certainly groundbreaking, but Green's ensuing effort was an outright *tour de force*.<sup>144</sup> Those two records alone, for several years, were sufficient to sustain my resolve as an aspiring rock musician. I spending endless hours trying to acquire that “bluesy” sound, and not without a modicum of success. But fluency was still a long way off.

Then, out of the blue, came African-American guitar sensation Jimi Hendrix!

*Jimi's paternal grandmother Zenora “Nora” Rose Hendrix (1883-1984), daughter of a Cherokee father and a mother of mixed race, moved to Vancouver, British Columbia in 1911. (Compton, 2001) Jimi's father Al Hendrix was born in Vancouver in 1919, the same year that seminal Jazz pianist and composer “Jelly Roll” Morton<sup>145</sup> began a two-year residency at Pat's Pub in the Patricia Hotel on East Hastings Street.<sup>146</sup> (Doheny, 2003). Al later married seventeen year-old American Lucille Jeter and moved to Seattle, where son Jimi was born in 1942.*

*Teenage “Jim Marshall”<sup>147</sup> would often come north to visit his grandmother in Vancouver, particularly in the Summer, working part-time as*

<sup>143</sup> In addition to Mayall (guitar, keyboards, vocals), Clapton, and Green - the Bluesbreakers were Mick Fleetwood (drums) and John McVie (bass).

<sup>144</sup> Literally (*en français*) “tower of strength.”

<sup>145</sup> Ferdinand Joseph Lamothe (1890-1941), better known as “Jelly Roll” Morton, self-proclaimed “Originator of Jazz,” was a frequent visitor to Vancouver, eventually becoming a transfer member of the Vancouver Musicians' Union (AFM Local 145) in 1919. (Miller, 1998) Born into a Creole community in the Faubourg Marigny neighbourhood of downtown New Orleans, Louisiana, Morton was a virtuoso pianist, a bandleader, and composer.

<sup>146</sup> With a group of black musicians from Seattle's AFM “coloured” Local 458.

<sup>147</sup> Born: Johnny Allen Hendrix.

*a longshoreman, and hanging out with local R&B musicians. (Beyer, 2000) Following discharge from the U.S. Army in 1964, he started a band with former military mate Billy Cox called the King Kasuals, and went on tour as a sideman with a recording acts like the Isley Brothers and Little Richard.*

*“Discovered” in 1966 while playing solo in a New York coffeehouse<sup>148</sup> by Chas Chandler (bassist for the British band - the Animals) he was invited to England where the Jimi Hendrix Experience became an instant sensation. Heavily influenced by both African-American bluesmen (like T-Bone Walker and Johnny “Guitar” Watson) and the white British rockers (notably Jeff Beck), he is widely regarded as the singular most influential guitarist in the history of the genre. Hendrix died of drug overdose in London on September 1970. (Cross, 2005; Lawrence, 2005)*

William Tell & the Marksmen were invited to record an original song for local folksinger Tom Northcott’s New Syndrome record label — a tune I’d written especially for the session called “Outside my Door.” I used my brand-new Maestro brand Fuzztone<sup>149</sup> device to give it that “Satisfaction”<sup>150</sup> sound. It was never released.

A few weeks later, lead singer Geoff Edington called a band meeting to make an announcement. It seems he’d been approached by another local group, called the Seeds of Time (SoT), and had decided to jump ship. The Marksmen were a conventional commercial pop-band. We wore mod clothes, had trendy Brit-pop hairdos, and played the latest pop hits. The SoTs, on the other hand, were a psychedelic group, in the mode of emergent San Francisco bands like the Jefferson Airplane, Country Joe and the Fish, and the Grateful Dead. Like the Marksmen, they too were self-taught musicians with limited instrumental facility.

<sup>148</sup> The Cheetah Club on W. 21st Street.

<sup>149</sup> A foot-switch operated guitar distortion device, distributed by the Gibson Guitar Company (HQ Kalamazoo, Michigan) in the 1960s.

<sup>150</sup> 1965 hit record for the Rolling Stones, written by Jagger-Richards, produced by Andrew Loog-Oldham for London/Decca Records, it is easily identified by its distinctive Fuzz-tone guitar hook.

Unlike us, however, the SoTs dared to “trip out” on lengthy improvisational forays.

*The secret of happiness is freedom, and the secret to freedom is a brave heart.*<sup>151</sup>

Thucydides (460-395BCE)

A generational upheaval was underway, with resistance to America’s war in Vietnam fueling discontent among white youth, and the civil-rights movement galvanizing militant blacks. Demonstrations at the 1968 Democratic Party convention in Chicago had resulted in beatings and multiple arrests. And, in California, the revolutionary Black Panther Party found itself under lethal attack by the FBI.

The “Summer of Love” had officially begun with the first Human Be-in held on 14 January 1967, in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. Two months later, on 26 March, Vancouver’s burgeoning counterculture community held its own “happening” at Ceperley Meadow, in Stanley Park near 2nd Beach .

“Free the music” and “power to the people” were popular political slogans of the day and the SoTs routinely played unlawfully in public parks without a permit. I enjoyed their enterprising cheekiness, and tagged along with Geoff to one of their rehearsals. We hit it off right away, and I was invited to join as well. We all celebrated by dropping acid. (Norton, 2006)

*First synthesized in 1938 by Swiss chemist Albert Hoffmann (1906-2008) from ergot, a fungus that grows on rye grain, “lysergic acid diethylamide” (LSD) is a psychedelic drug of the ergoline family. Typically taken orally on a substrate such as absorbent blotter paper, the threshold dosage level needed to cause a psychoactive effect on humans is between 20 and 30*

<sup>151</sup> From *History of the Peloponnesian War* (bk. 1 Sec. 43) by Thucydides (460-395BCE) known as “the father of scientific inquiry.”

*micrograms. (Greiner et al, 1958)*

*Initially produced by Sandoz Laboratories (Switzerland) LSD showed early promise as a drug with psychiatric uses. Generally beginning within thirty minutes of ingestion, the LSD user may experience anything from subtle changes in perception to overwhelming cognitive shifts. Changes in auditory and visual perception are typical. Higher doses often cause intense distortions of sensory perception such as synaesthesia, the experience of additional spatial or temporal dimensions(Greiner et al,1958)*

*Some users consider LSD a religious sacrament. Stanislav Grof, for instance, indicates that religious and mystical experiences observed during LSD sessions appear to be “phenomenologically indistinguishable” from similar descriptions in the sacred scriptures of the great religions of the world and the secret mystical texts of ancient civilizations.(Grof, 1979, 13-14)*

*Though proscribed commercially in the United States, prior to October 6, 1966, LSD was freely available for experimental purposes. Prominent among academic enthusiasts were clinical psychologists Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert (Ram Das) who, in 1962, founded the International Foundation for Internal Freedom at Harvard University. Their association with Harvard was terminated, however, following allegations that they had distributed hallucinogens to their students. (Greenfield, 2006)*

Transition from one band to the other was awkward, and not without its moment of melodrama. The Marksmen had been booked to play a Seymour Street nightclub on the same night the SoTs were booked to play a hippie dancehall on nearby Davie Street. While the Marksmen had found a new lead-singer, they hadn't yet arranged a replacement for me on guitar. Consequently, I was “double booked.”

The nightclub owner, a well-connected local promoter, was adamant that I stay and perform at his establishment and quickly called the Musicians Association to ensure that very outcome.

*The American Federation of Musicians (AFM) was founded in 1896, succeeding the National League of Musicians, a loosely administered “ad hoc” organization. The AFM’s best known official was long-serving President James Caesar Petrillo (1892-1984) Originally a trumpet player, in 1922 he was elected head of the Chicago, Illinois Local #10. This was the era of Al Capone and the Italian/Irish Mob. Petrillo proved more than up to the task.*

*Elected AFM National President in 1940, he dominated the union with absolute authority. His most famous actions involved a ban on all commercial recordings by union members from 1942–1944 (again in 1948) to pressure record companies into paying higher royalty rates to artists and session musicians. These became known “the Petrillo Bans.”*

*Retiring as in 1958, Petrillo continued to serve the AFM as President “emeritus.” In the 1960s he was appointed head of the union’s “Civil Rights Division” which championed the desegregation of both AFM locals and the venues where member musicians played. (Leiter, 1953)*

Directorship of the Vancouver Musicians Association c.1967 was drawn from three main local *status quo* groups. First was the older crowd: former big-band and Dixieland jazz mavens like Dal Richards, Claude Logan, and Lance Harrison *et al.* Indeed, Local 145 had been their fiefdom since the Petrillo days.

Then there was the highbrow set — members of the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra (VSO), the CBC Orchestra, and the Vancouver Opera Association (VOA) Orchestra — with each organization involved in complicated collective bargaining negotiations. Third, there was the local R&B establishment, the very same “grease-band” musicians whose hegemony we scruffy, long-haired, hippie types had only recently managed to usurp.

The union’s executive board didn’t have a clue what to do with us. Our counter-

culture lifestyle was a particular bone of contention. For instance, they couldn't understand our collective approach to doing business, with shared expenses and communal living arrangements. Plus, playing *ad hoc* political rallies in the park went against everything they stood for. And doing it unlawfully confirmed our status as dangerous subversives.

The union business agent showed up within minutes of being summoned. A 30-something bantam rooster, with shiny hair and black leather sportscoat, he was accompanied by two imposing associates in suits. The five of us retired to the club manager's office to discuss "our little problem."

"Listen kid," said the agent, pointedly cracking his knuckles in my face, "you're gonna play here tonight — or you ain't playin' nowhere — *capiche?*"<sup>152</sup>

"Yeah!" piped one of his colleagues. "*Capiche?!!*"

I couldn't believe it! It was like a scene from the movie *On the Waterfront*.<sup>153</sup> Was my own professional association threatening me with physical violence? It sure seemed that way.

"How about this?" I ventured, improvising on the spot. "What if I play both gigs? They're pretty close to each other — only a few blocks apart. I'll bet that with a car and driver at the ready, I could shuttle between the two of them, and everything would work out fine."

The heavies looked at each other, doubtless marveling at the logic.

<sup>152</sup> 1940s American slang, from the Italian "capisci?" meaning "do you understand?" (also coppish, kabish, capeesh).

<sup>153</sup> A 1954 film for Columbia Pictures, focussing on violent and corrupt relations endemic to organized labour and organized crime, written by Bud Schulberg, directed by Elia Kazan, starring Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb, Eva Marie Saint, and Rod Steiger.

“Okay,” said the club owner.

“Better not screw up!” snarled the union agent.

“Yeah!” chimed his *droog*. “Better not!”

Whew! I’d wiggled out of that one, and even managed to get paid double on the night. But it was the beginning of a long and bumpy relationship with the Musician’s Association (I never quite trusted organized labour after that).

The Seeds of Time in their heyday played all the local psychedelic palaces, like the Afterthought<sup>154</sup> on 4th Avenue in Kitsilano, the Pender Auditorium downtown,<sup>155</sup> the Big Mother on Beatty Street, and the Retinal Circus<sup>156</sup> in the West End.

*As a kid, [the Seeds of Time] were my West Coast Rolling Stones and Velvet Underground all rolled into one . . . Punks ahead of their time . . . Anti-authoritarian, rebellious, outrageous . . . and funny.*<sup>157</sup>

Tom Harrison, 2009

Yes, the SoTs were pretty hot stuff c.1968, playing events all over town. But, whereas the Greater Vancouver metropolitan area was relatively “hip,” the surrounding municipalities remained painfully “straight.” So, when invited to participate in a “Battle of the Bands” at a small-town central B.C. high school, we were naturally apprehensive.

<sup>154</sup> Located in the old Kitsilano Cinema, later the Russian Community Centre. Originally operated by the Kruz (Krushelniski) brothers Terry and Gerry. Later by Roger Schiffer.

<sup>155</sup> Home of Vancouver’s inaugural 1968 “Trips Festival,” hosted by Doug Hawthorne.

<sup>156</sup> Opened originally by Jim Whisby as Dante’s Inferno; later, as the Retinal Circus by Roger Schiffer and Blaine Culling (currently of Granville Entertainment Ltd).

<sup>157</sup> “Tom’s top five B.C. bands.” In the Vancouver Province, 11 March 2009.



The other groups in the competition were mainstream teenybopper fodder, wholesome and clean, like bright shiny pennies. A fistful of pot-metal slugs by comparison, we SoTs were resigned to finishing dead last in every judging category (grooming, band uniforms, choreography, repertoire, stage presence, etc). Moreover, it seemed that our scruffy appearance and irreverent demeanour had drawn the ire of the school's preppie jock-squad, who clearly wanted us gone in a hurry (why on Earth did they invite us in the first place?)

Undaunted, we decided to go out in dramatic style, selecting (for their listening pleasure) the most grotesquely inappropriate tune we could think of — “Heroin” by the New York group Velvet Underground.<sup>158</sup>

*When I put a spike into my vein  
I tell ya, things aren't quite the same<sup>159</sup>*

The judging panel (comprising the Vice Principal, the Guidance Counselor, the Head Cheerleader, the Captain of the football team, and the Student Council President) was visibly perturbed. No Matter. After milking every exquisite moment of cognitive dissonance, we quickly packed up and drove back to Vancouver — empty-handed, but triumphant just the same.

The SoTs had a manager too. Arthur James “Time” Wilson, a twenty-three year-old Kitsilano native with a background in radio broadcasting and public relations, was (and remains) an enthusiastic homosexual — not effeminate or flamboyant, but as queer as can be nonetheless. He never made advances toward me though.

“What’s the matter?” I said, feigning disappointment. “Not your type?”

<sup>158</sup> Featuring singer-songwriter Lou Reed on lead vocals.

<sup>159</sup> From the LP *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, recorded in 1966 during Andy Warhol's Exploding Plastic Inevitable multimedia event tour, it was released in March 1967 by Verve Records, and would gain notoriety for its experimentalist performance sensibilities and controversial lyrical content.

“Of course not.” he deadpanned, “You’re not gay.”

Jim’s sexuality was never an issue with the band, except maybe out of town, when he’d decide to pick an argument with some local homo-hating red-necks. Then we’d have to dive in and rescue his sorry ass.

“I have an idea,” he said. “Let’s take this act coast to coast.”

Always game for shenanigans, we gleefully drove the front wheels of our blue Ford Econoline van into the Pacific Ocean off Jericho Beach and vowed not to stop until we’d done the same in the Atlantic.

The first leg of our nationwide sojourn began in Banff, Alberta, with a week-long engagement at the Grizzly House, where we made our initial stake. Then we headed east — five people and all our musical gear in the van, followed by singer Geoff and his new bride Jocelyn (on their honeymoon) driving their wedding present (from her parents) — a brand new Datsun station wagon.

It wasn’t a “tour” in the conventional music-business sense. More like a hair-brained adventure. We had no gigs booked, and very little money — barely enough for gas and food. The idea was to simply get there and see what happens. The prairies were endlessly flat and hot, and the fumes from the van’s overworked engine almost poisoned us on several occasions. Bypassing Winnipeg, we headed straight for Kenora, across the border in Ontario. The north shore of Lake Superior, with its white sand beaches glistening in the full moon, was outstanding. Eschewing motels to save money, we camped out in tents, often sleeping out under the stars.

It took three days to reach T.O. (Toronto, Ontario), where we limped in with a broken wheel bearing. Leaving the van full of gear at a gas station (praying we could afford repairs) we drifted off to explore.

The Yorkville district c.1968 was Toronto's hippie HQ — full of hippie sights, smells, and sounds. I wandered into a Sam the Record Man store, wondering what was popular on the local scene. Then I heard it, over the in-store sound system. The Jeff Beck Group's 1968 debut LP *Truth* with young Rod Stewart on lead vocals. I was floored! A work of extraordinary innovation. Beck *et al*<sup>160</sup> had clearly taken things to another level.

We crashed overnight on floor of somebody's hippie pad, and somebody picked the van up in the morning. Putting the bill on somebody's credit card, we resumed the journey east to Montréal where we slept on somebody else's floor. Staying over for a few days to catch our breath (and a much needed shower), we then headed east along the southern shore of the St. Lawrence River towards Gaspé.

Turning right at Rivière-du-Loup we rumbled down through New Brunswick, past Edmunston, Fredericton and Moncton, then across the land-bridge into Nova Scotia. Finally, more than a week after beginning our journey in the Rocky Mountains, we drove our bandwagon into the Atlantic at an oceanside family-campsite near Peggy's Cove.

We'd made it. But, now what? There were no gigs for us there (Halifax having yet to embrace the hippie counter culture scene). So we ended up busking at the campsite for a few extra day's rent and some gas money to get back to Montréal.

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<sup>160</sup> South London-born Geoffrey Arnold Beck (b.1944) is one of the three noted blues-based rock guitarists to have played with The Yardbirds, the others being Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page. Supporting members included Mickey Waller (drums), Ron Wood (bass), and Nicky Hopkins (piano).

The friend whose apartment we'd just previously invaded was kind enough to move out altogether and leave the place to us. We stayed the entire summer (seven people in a 3-room flat), and 1968 was a hot one.

Canada's Expo 67 World's Fair, held the previous year, had been a huge success. So, with the cooperation of the key participating countries, officials decided to extend operations into Summer 1968,<sup>161</sup> with most of the national pavilions remaining open — notably the USA's giant Buckminster Fuller designed geodesic dome.

Montréal was *très chic*, the clothing shops on *rue St. Catherine* featuring all the latest Euro designs — voluminous “elephant pants,” colourful satin shirts, and square-toed, platform shoes. But we'd pulled into town with little more than the clothing on our backs — blue jeans, t-shirts, and cowboy boots.

There were precious few opportunities for scruffy *anglais* rock bands like us. It was summertime, for instance, so high school dances were out. Plus, other than the Esquire Showbar (on the corner of *rue Stanley et Ste. Catherine*), Montréal didn't seem to have much of a live-music scene at all, with “disco” then being the prevailing mode of entertainment.<sup>162</sup>

Contrastingly, however, we'd see people lined-up around the block at various *vieux-Montréal* venues like the *Hôtel Iroquois*, waiting to see and hear Canada's poet laureate of wine, women, and song — Leonard Cohen. But Leonard wasn't singing much back then, mainly just reciting from his books. Counting heads, we figured he must have been raking in the dough, especially having no transport or

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<sup>161</sup> Operating under the banner “Man and His World,” the Expo-67 site remained open until 1981, finally falling into disrepair and decay.

<sup>162</sup> Combining the French words “disque”(disc) and “bibliothèque” (library). That is, a nightclub where patrons dance to recorded music, rather than a live band. First popularized in 1950s Paris.

production expenses.

*La belle province* was being rocked that summer by *le Front de Liberation du Québec* (FLQ), a nationalist revolutionary group dedicated to the foundation of an entirely separate, independent country of Quebec. The movement had been given a morale boost the previous year when French President Charles de Gaulle, in a speech from the balcony of Montreal's *Hotel de Ville* (city hall) during an official visit to Expo 67, famously declared, "*Vive le Québec libre!*" (long live free Québec).<sup>163</sup>

Inspired by Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), the FLQ seemed quite willing to employ terror tactics to further their nationalist cause. Indeed, it seemed like hardly a week went by without some sort of explosion going off nearby. A mailbox blew up around the corner from our flat, for instance, and the Metro Police station on *rue Bonsecours* (a few blocks away) was similarly fire-bombed. But we never felt personally threatened. In fact, folks were very nice to us

We particularly enjoyed the fact that the legal drinking age in Québec was eighteen, and that we could buy beer at the neighbourhood *épicerie* (grocery store). Our public watering-hole of choice was the Hotel Nelson *en Place Jacques Cartier* where, when we could afford it, we'd order rounds of *gros Cinquantes* (quart bottles of Labatts 50).

We couldn't help noticing that Montréal women were more stylish than their left-coast counterparts. For instance, while driving downtown in the bandwagon one afternoon, we saw a stunningly attractive, Bardot-esque *jeune-fille avec une petite*

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<sup>163</sup> July 24, 1967.

*carniche*<sup>164</sup> waiting to cross the street. Montréal motorists are notoriously predacious, and loathe to concede any territorial advantage — and particularly to pedestrians. Nevertheless, all four opposing lanes came to a screeching halt as she sashayed sexily across the street in front of us. We all sat stunned, frozen in place, google-eyed and tongue-tied for what seemed like an eternity as *mademoiselle elle et son chien* continued down the block.

*Vive la différence* indeed.

With no paying engagements on the immediate horizon, and funds running out, we deftly arranged for someone back in Vancouver to mail us a pound of Mexican marijuana via Canada Post. Due to the tense political climate in Québec, and the gigantic blue-and-white *fleur de lis* flag flying from our neighbours' window — Montréal's Metro Police maintained close surveillance of our building. The contraband was nevertheless hand delivered right under their noses (in a plain brown wrapper), yielding a modest profit (enough to sustain us for an extra week or two).

Then we got an honest break. Someone had caught an impromptu “unplugged” performance at the Matter of Opinion Coffee House on *rue Notre Dame Est*, liked what they heard, and invited us to participate in a battle of the bands at *la Ronde*<sup>165</sup> — the futuristic midway-style amusement park situated on the former Expo 67 site.

Co-sponsored by Snoopy's Discotheque<sup>166</sup> and local radio station CKGM, the summer-long American Idol-type contest pitted local bands against each other in an outdoor amphitheatre setting.

<sup>164</sup> Young lady with a small poodle.

<sup>165</sup> “The Round.”

<sup>166</sup> Located downtown on *rue Sherbrooke*.

Recalling our earlier B.C. “battle of the bands” debacle, we were initially reluctant to sign-on. The only non-francophones in the contest, we somehow found ourselves billed as the “Leeds of Tune” (an utterly inexplicable mistranslation). Surprisingly well received on our first outing, we were invited back to compete again the following week. Our next performance was better attended, and the audience noticeably more appreciative. Recalled for a third appearance, we again went over well.

Our popularity was difficult to explain. We were from “British” Columbia, waaay over on the other side of the country. We didn’t speak French, and routinely found ways to mangle the native tongue. But *les jeunesses* didn’t seem to mind. In fact, they rather seemed to enjoy our lame efforts to communicate *en francais*. And we were irreverent too, our mischievous Rockabilly-style rendition of “God Save the Queen” preceding the Sex Pistols’ angry Punk version<sup>167</sup> by almost a decade.

The judging panel kept asking us back, and we began to inspire a loyal following. First it was fan mail, with one or two letters delivered to the apartment each day. Then, suddenly, a cluster of teenage girls began camping out on the sidewalk across the street, stalking us in alternate half-day shifts, waiting to catch a fleeting glimpse of the elusive “west-coast hippie rock dude.” It felt good, I must admit, like our own private little Beatlemania.

Our flat, situated above an abandoned Victorian-era opera house at *1201 rue Notre Dame Est*, was in the poorest French-speaking part of the city. A once-grande address (200 years ago), it was now on the wrong side of the tracks, in a decaying

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<sup>167</sup> An English proto-punk band managed by London-based impresario Malcolm McLaren, The Sex Pistols comprised vocalist Johnny Rotten, guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook and bassist Glen Matlock (replaced by Sid Vicious in early 1977). Their 1977 single “God Save the Queen,” attacking Britons’ social conformity and deference to the crown, generated considerable controversy.

industrial area separated from the trendy tourist section of town by acres of waterfront railyard. Slated for eventual demolition,<sup>168</sup> the rent was month to month with no lease — and cheap.<sup>169</sup>

The sight of scruffy, barefoot urchins playing hide-and-seek in the decaying broken-glass and cinderblock strewn streetscape was initially unsettling. But looking directly south across the river to *Isle St. Hélène*, we had a clear view of the brand-new, sparkly clean, ultra-modern Expo 67 site.

*Them that's got shall get.*<sup>170</sup>

Billie Holiday, 1942

Getting down to business, we composed some new material especially for the contest and rehearsed all day long with the windows necessarily left wide open in the sweltering heat. Consequently, our groupies across the street enjoyed an ongoing daily concert. On breaks we'd go up on the roof and wave to them. With school out for the summer, they were free to stick around for weeks on end, and often did, occasionally bringing us presents, sometimes even food (likely liberated from their parents' freezers).

Somehow we made it all the way it to the finals, where we found ourselves pitted against a stylish 4-piece outfit from Laval which had thought to bring along its own cheering section. We were outsiders, didn't speak the lingo, played mostly original songs (not top-forty hits), and looked like a bunch of homeless hippie goofballs (which we were). But the audience liked us best, voting narrowly in our favour. Our triumphant *bis final*<sup>171</sup> was indeed memorable, not so much for its

<sup>168</sup> Most of the original 1200 block *rue Notre Dame Est* is no longer standing, having been demolished in the 1990s and replaced by a modern office/condominium complex.

<sup>169</sup> \$150.

<sup>170</sup> Song Lyric, from *God Bless the Child*, written by Billie Holiday and Arthur Herzog Jr. in 1939, and first released on Okeh Records 1942.

<sup>171</sup> Encore.



musical excellence, but its unexpected conclusion.

“*Merci, merci*” offered SoT singer Geoff, striding confidently back and forth across the front of the stage, waving to the wildly appreciative crowd.

“*Nous sommes de Colombie-Britannique!* (We’re from British Columbia!),” he declared, gamely channeling every high school French class he ever slept through.

“*Et nous sommes perdus!*” (And we are lost!).

The audience roared . . .

“*Où sommes-nous?* (Where are we?) he inquired, “*Quel est cet place magique ?* (What is this magic place?)”

“*La Ronde!!*” the audience shouted in response.

“*Que?!!* (what?!),” Geoff yelled back.

“*La Ronde!!*” they shouted again, and louder

“*Que?!!*” Geoff volleyed, shamelessly milking the situation.

“*La Ronde!! La Ronde! La Ronde!*” came the even louder reply.

“*Vive la Ronde!!*” bellowed Geoff . . . and the crowd went crazy.

Thinking the show was over, we bowed, waved goodbye, and left the stage. But

Geoff wasn't finished. Turning around suddenly, he ran back out, grabbed a microphone, and, with a cheeky grin, yelled . . .

*“Vive la Ronde libre!!”*

The audience just sat there, stunned, staring at each other.

*“Qu'a-t-il dit?”<sup>172</sup>*

Convinced that we'd offended, we abandoned our instruments and began running towards our dressing room in the rotunda behind the stage. Leaping from their seats *en masse*, the crowd of several hundred surged forward, shouting “Leeds of Tune! Leeds of Tune! *Nous vous aimons!*”<sup>173</sup>

Expo security locked the building's glass doors behind us — with barely seconds to spare.

“What'd I do?” said Geoff, feigning innocence. “Wha . . . ?”

It was a Rock & Roll dream come true, being mobbed by fans — a bit scary perhaps, but great fun. Then, suddenly it dawned on us. The drums, keyboards and amplifiers were still on stage outside, vulnerable to pilferage or destruction. Thankfully, however, the crowd had only meant us well, and the gear survived unscathed.

The contest's sponsors had hoped to present us with the winning trophy on stage, but the audience's unscheduled eruption effectively stymied their plans, so they

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<sup>172</sup> “What did he say?!”

<sup>173</sup> We love you!

had to settle for a private dressing room ceremony. We hung around for a while, savouring our unlikely triumph, and waiting for the crowd of adoring fans outside to thin out. Then we signed some autographs, packed up the gear, and went back to our dingy apartment — none the richer (except for the trophy) but satisfied nonetheless.

The Summer of '68 was starting to wind down. Our daily ration of baked potatoes and stale bread had rendered us all rather skeletal, and the novelty of sacrifice for art's sake had well worn off. Notwithstanding our victorious performance, it was time to head home.

CKGM's on-air promotion had managed to generate a few paying gigs — not many, but enough to finance the 3,000 mile trek westward. I, however, had the good sense to get seriously ill, and spent the final week in Montreal General Hospital. My parents (by then divorced) dutifully collaborated on the purchase of an airline ticket home, but the other SoTs were compelled to make the grueling 3,000 mile highway journey by car.

Vancouver's counter-culture community welcomed us home with open arms. We'd been away for several months, and our supporters missed us dearly. We headlined at the Retinal Circus, Vancouver's downtown "hippie headquarters" and various other alternative venues around town. Then, with the Fall term getting underway, we picked up a number of decent paying high school and community-centre dances, eventually putting enough money aside to rent a communal band-house near Renfrew Park on the East-Side.

Consistent with the times, as one of B.C.'s leading rock bands, the SoTs were called upon to play numerous political rallies, like for imprisoned American

activist John Sinclair,<sup>174</sup> the *Simon Fraser 114*,<sup>175</sup> and the Georgia Straight alternative newspaper<sup>176</sup> which had routinely been the target of Vancouver Mayor Tom “Terrific” Campbell’s reactionary ire.

Sure, we had plenty of street-level notoriety but, being true-blue Rock & Rollers, what we really wanted was a hit record.<sup>177</sup> Steve Grossman was an eighteen year-old Montréal-born whiz-kid who, while attending Gr. 12 at Point Grey High School in Vancouver, somehow managed to parlay his wise-ass bravado into a successful on-air slot with Kitsilano-based radio station CFUN.<sup>178</sup>

Seeking to expand his youthful media empire, Steve built a recording studio (PBS), founded his own custom record label (Coast Records), and began looking for local acts to sign. Convinced that the Seeds of Time had the right stuff, he began to court us aggressively.

Legendary 1950s Rock & Roll icon Little Richard<sup>179</sup> had been booked to play a week-long engagement at Isy’s Supper Club on West Georgia Street. Grossman arranged for us to attend as guests of the club’s owner Isy Walters, and afterwards meet Richard himself. The legal drinking age in B.C. back then was twenty-one, but because of Steve’s local celebrity, they served us anyway. I remember ordering a Singapore Sling, a fruity beginner cocktail, and feeling very adult. The show was terrific fun, with Richard in full pancake make-up, eye-shadow, false lashes, and lipstick, and dressed in a sequined white jumpsuit, white Beatle-boots and feathery boa wrap — camping it up in outrageous high-style.

<sup>174</sup> Michigan-born John Sinclair (b. 1941) leader of the White Panther Party — a militantly anti-racist group of white socialists linked to the Black Panther Party, sentenced in 1969 to 10 years imprisonment.

<sup>175</sup> A loosely constituted group of political activists arrested at a “sit-in” at Simon Fraser University.

<sup>176</sup> Published by hippie entrepreneur Dan McLeod.

<sup>177</sup> Prior to the introduction of the compact disc (CD), vinyl “records” came in three formats: the 10-inch, 78 rpm; the 12-inch 33 rpm LP; and the 7.5-inch, 45rpm “single.”

<sup>178</sup> 1410 on your Vancouver radio dial.

<sup>179</sup> Macon, Georgia-born Richard Penniman (b. 1932) is a famous 1950s-era American Rock & Roll star, with classic hits like “Tutti Frutti,” “Good Golly Miss Molly,” and “Long Tall Sally.”

*A-wop-bom-aloo-mop-a-lop-bam-boom!*

Afterwards, we waited a respectful length of time, then went backstage and knocked on the dressing room door (identified by its large silver star). A handsome middle-aged black lady answered.

“Can I help you gentlemen?” she said, only partially opening the door to protect the star’s privacy.

“Please tell Richard that Mr. Grossman is here with his friends,” replied Steve.

“Come on in boys,” said Richard from behind the door. There he was, surrounded by lights and mirrors, wearing an exotic silk bathrobe and matching ostrich-plumed turban.

“Please say hello to Miss Lottie the Body.”

She didn’t recognize me of course, but I sure knew her.

“Would you boys like something to drink?” she inquired maternally. “Tea? Soda?”

Richard was most gracious, and held us in thrall for some time. “Thanks for dropping by Steve,” he said as we were leaving. “Do stay in touch.”

Impressed with Grossman’s show-biz connections, we signed with Coast Records and set to work on composing our first release. Our initial foray, a tune I wrote called “My Home Town,” came about in a rather unusual manner.

We were playing at the Village Bistro, a folk-rock club in Kitsilano, when our

drummer and keyboard player, while outside getting some fresh air on a break, inadvertently found themselves detained by the notorious, hippie-hassling RCMP “narc” Abe Snedenko (later made famous by Cheech and Chong in the 1978 film *Up in Smoke*).<sup>180</sup>

The break ended, and it was time to go up and play again, but our bandmates were still missing in action. Improvising on the spot, lead-singer Geoff sidled over to the drums, and, with Steve on bass and me on lead guitar, we started killing time as a power-trio. Riffing in the key of E-major, I got going on a “chonka-chonka-chonka” Texas-boogie kind of thing, then started singing words off the top of my head — silly inane drivel, whatever came to mind.

*Down in my home town, there is a girrrl.  
I'm gonna make that girrrl mine.  
yada yada yada . . . etc, etc, etc . . .*

We did several more hastily improvised numbers, similarly replete with long, dragged-out guitar-solo sections. Then, having been sufficiently shaken down by Snedenko and his crew — our colleagues returned to finish the set.

Afterwards, Grossman came storming into the dressing room, eyes all ablaze.

“That’s it!!” he proclaimed. “That’s the one we’ve been looking for. Where have you been keeping it?!”

“What are you talking about?” I said.

“The song you opened with,” he blubbered. “You know . . . the chonka-chonka-

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<sup>180</sup> Written by Cheech and Chong, directed by Lou Adler for Paramount Pictures, and starring Cheech Marin, Tommy Chong, Edie Adams, Strother Martin and Stacy Keach.

chonka one about your home town. It's a smash!"

"You've got to be kidding!" I said. "We've been slaving away for months trying to come up with a commercially viable tune, and you're telling me that this piece of junk that I just made up on the spot is it? Are you out of your fucking mind? Besides, I don't even remember it. How did it go? Chonka chonka chonka? What did you say were the words about?"

Somehow I managed to retrieve the song from my mental hard-drive, and "My Home Town" became a modest nationwide hit, charting top-ten as far afield as Winnipeg and Toronto. I remember hearing it on the radio for the first time, while stopped at a downtown Vancouver intersection in bass-player Steve's parents' 1963 Ford Fairlane. We cranked up the volume, opened all the windows and, with motorists and bystanders watching confusedly, danced around the car like lunatics.

Coast Records was headquartered at Panorama Film Studios,<sup>181</sup> tucked away in the woods above the Upper Levels Highway, on Cypress Ridge in West Vancouver. Our recording space doubled as the facility's screening room. So, whenever the film's producers needed to watch their dailies, we were required to temporarily vacate — a minor convenience, considering the endless hours we spent there.

The first major movie project to come through was *Carnal Knowledge*, directed by Mike Nichols, and starring Jack Nicholson, Candice Bergen, Rita Moreno, Ann Margret, and Art Garfunkel. Typically, we'd get a warning call and the catering crew would show up within the hour, bringing in *hors d'oeuvres* and a well-stocked bar. The principals usually arrived around 6:00pm, and, after snacks and a

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<sup>181</sup> Located above the Upper Levels Highway at Folkstone way, the studios various buildings were razed in the 1980s to make way for upscale residential development.

few drinks, would be gone by 7:30. Then, we'd set our instruments back up, and continue recording into the wee hours.

They were very nice to us, not at all rude or condescending — director Nichols in particular. Ann-Margret was vivacious and funny, Rita too, and twenty-four year-old *ingenue* Candy was downright fetching. We didn't see much of Jack, who rather kept to himself, but Artie would occasionally sneak back to the studio in the late evening to sample our splendid Moroccan hash.

Shooting eventually wrapped, with Nichols and Co. leaving behind a virtual hoard of props and decorations slated for auction. On the final day of production, the property master hinted that if any uncatalogued items were to somehow “disappear” (wink wink, nudge nudge) they weren't likely to be missed.

Live-in girlfriend Cindy and I went to see *Carnal Knowledge* when it came out and were particularly amused when, during the climactic sex scene where Rita Moreno goes down on Jack Nicholson, our faux-Tiffany bedside lamp was clearly in-frame, slightly above and behind her bobbing head.

The release of “My Home Town” gave the SoTs a big boost. Offers came rolling in and our fee increased considerably. Our first big headline show was at the Pender Auditorium, near the Cenotaph Memorial downtown. Presented by local music maven Sam Feldman, it sold out quickly, generating a long lineup around the block for last minute tickets — and we seriously rocked the joint!

Vancouver booking agent Bruce Allen (later to gain notoriety as manager of world renowned acts like Bachman Turner, Bryan Adams, Martina McBride, and Michael Bubl ) got his start in the music business as a lowly lightman at



Lassetter's Den Cabaret on Vancouver's Eastside. Adroitly sensing a business opportunity, he began booking the club's house band at other venues. Soon, he was representing all the best commercial groups in town.

The Seeds of Time, however, were patently uncommercial. Rather we were raucous, irreverent, and profane. Nevertheless, in a seemingly counter-intuitive move, Bruce agreed to take us on.

The Canadian recording industry c.1969, centred in Toronto and regional in scope, was a relatively bush-league affair. Even though "My Home Town" had enjoyed "high-rotation" on Toronto's leading AM radio station CFTO, there was no organized touring infrastructure in place across the country, no nationwide network of reputable booking agents and promoters, and no established sequence of suitable venues in which to play.

Westcoast bands had a particularly difficult time traveling out-of-province, the Rocky Mountains representing a major physical and psychological barrier. With thousands of kilometres separating population centres, roadwork was a grueling affair. And air travel was relatively uncommon back then. Indeed, the only Canadian band at the time with any sort of nationwide touring presence was the Guess Who, a veteran Winnipeg outfit. Notwithstanding the SoTs recent Montréal adventure, the farthest afield we could generally afford to roam was Alberta, with Edmonton being a particularly favourite town to terrorize.

The 1970s were suddenly upon us, and Spring meant that the 5th annual Easter Sunday Be-In in Stanley Park was nigh. Having outgrown its original site at Ceperley Meadow, the 1971 edition had spontaneously moved to a larger open field near Prospect Point.

The crowd of several thousand stoned-out “heads” began hiking into the park shortly after dawn, with band vehicles gingerly navigating past the throng into the parking area behind the temporary stage. Backstage was a tribal gathering unto itself, with musicians engaged in all sorts of occupational banter. The business of arranging the afternoon’s order of appearance, for instance, had thereunto been a consensual process taking into consideration a group’s seniority within the musical community, its current popularity with the general public, and logistics regarding travel to engagements later in the day. As in the previous several years, it was a friendly, collegial discussion. That is, until the Bolsheviks got involved.

*Students for a Democratic University (SDU) was formed in McGill and Simon Fraser University in 1968. The SDU at SFU drew members from the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA), New Democratic Party (NDP) Youth, the SFU Liberal Club, and the Young Socialists. The SDU played a prominent role in the 1968 protests at SFU, which led to the occupation administration offices, and the arrest of 114 students.*

*Following dissolution of the SDU in 1969, some members joined the Youth International Party (Yippies), while other more strident activists united to form the Vancouver Liberation Front. (Mercer, 2009)*

The Vancouver Liberation Front (VLF), a group of far-left activists from Simon Fraser University, were bent on commandeering our hometown’s hippie “love-in.” They arrived early, about twenty of them, with armbands and walkie-talkies, immediately directing traffic and telling people where to go and what to do. While the audio-technicians and musicians were occupied with setting up the amplifiers, drums and sound equipment — the self-appointed revolutionary vanguard stealthily moved in and roped-off key areas, effectively precluding open access to the rear of the stage.

Within moments, our groovy *ad hoc* inter-band council was disrupted by a

phalanx of clipboard wielding prefects.

“We, the leadership of the VLF, have decided who is to play today, and in what order,” declared their Chairman (the one with the biggest armband), who then listed off each band’s name and start time.

“Excuse me,” I said, “but you seem to have forgotten the Seeds of Time.”

“No mistake.” he snapped. “You’re not on the list.”

“Why not! We’ve played every Be-In so far, and our fans are out there waiting to hear us.”

“The leadership of the Vancouver Liberation Front hereby excludes the Seeds of Time from performing,” he declared, reading from some sort of prepared text.

“For betraying the revolution and selling out to capitalist interests!”

“What . . . ?!” I squawked (as did everyone else within earshot).

“Are you telling me that after playing countless fundraisers for John Sinclair and the SDS, for the SFU 114, for Kool Aid (a drop-in clinic for street youth), and for Dan McLeod and his precious Georgia Straight newspaper, we’re not allowed to perform today — simply because we’ve got a hit record on the radio?!!”

“That’s right,” he said, “and because you are known to consort with decadent American movie stars.”

“Unbelievable!”

“The rest of you!” he announced, turning to address the other musicians, “will report and sign in before going up onstage!”

Then, regrouping shoulder to shoulder, they retreated to the security of their carefully guarded enclave. Returning to the parking lot, where the other SoTs were getting ready to unload the gear, I must have been purple with rage.

What’s wrong?” asked Geoff?

“They won’t let us play,” I said, almost choking on the words.

“You’re kidding?! Why?”

“You won’t believe it! They’re monitoring the stage, and won’t let us anywhere close.

Danny Mack, lead-singer for the band Fireweed, similarly miffed by the VLF’s bullying tactics, wandered over and joined our conversation.

“Dig this,” he said, offering a conspiratorial alternative. “We’ll go on and do a few songs. After twenty or so minutes, we’ll get into a long, drawn-out psychedelic jam. Then you guys sneak out into the audience, climb up on stage from the front side, and slowly take our places one by one — right under their tight-ass fucking noses!”

A brilliant idea (generous too), and it worked like a charm. Fireweed went on as scheduled and did a few numbers. Then drummer Stan Tait moved over, and our man Rocket Norton casually slid in. Ditto with their Leroy Stevens and our Steve Walley on bass, then the same with keyboards and guitar. Several tunes later, with

the switcheroo fully complete, SoT singer Geoff magically materialized at the microphone and began to sing.

*Down in my home town, there is a girrl . . . I'm gonna . . .*

Sure enough — the politburo was caught unawares. The look of sheer horror on their faces when they looked up and figured out what was going on — was priceless!

There they were, dashing around backstage in full pout, vainly trying to shut off the electrical power, while we closed to a rousing response.

“You’ll never play the Easter Be-In again!” they huffed, hurling epithets and shaking their fists.

“Fuck the revolution!” was all I could muster.

The VLF goon-squad was even more militant the following year, and the spectre of serious physical violence effectively precluded our appearance. But the Human Be-In concept had by then gone stale, and no one really gave a shit. Clearly, the Summer of Love was over.

The next Hollywood production to interrupt our record making at Panorama Studios was *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, a 19th century period-piece directed by Robert Altman and starring Warren Beatty and Julie Christie. The same rules applied with respect to facility-sharing and they too invited us to stick around for their daily full-service screening ritual.

Warren and then domestic partner Julie had rented a luxurious West Vancouver villa for the duration of the shoot. Himself tended to be a bit reclusive, preferring to relax quietly at home in the evening after work, but the lovely Ms. Christie liked to party, and would occasionally turn up at SoT gigs downtown in the discreet company of her hairdresser.

The follow-up to “My Home Town” was a tune entitled “Cryin’ the Blues.”<sup>182</sup> It wasn’t a blues song, just a rock song with the word “blues” in the title. Released in 1971, it too was a regional hit, and our fee (already somewhat enhanced) skyrocketed!

Our first \$1000 payday<sup>183</sup> (a significant financial breakthrough) was at the Community Hall in the northern B.C. logging community of Prince George. To commemorate our good fortune, we decided to splurge on four corner penthouse suites at the Inn of the North, a first-rate local hostelry<sup>184</sup> catering mainly to government officials and resource industry executives.

Soon after checking in, however, we received a call from the front desk informing us that someone from the local RCMP detachment wanted to speak with us. We gathered in the lobby restaurant.

“There’s been a death threat made against one of you,” said the ranking officer, calmly sipping a cup of black coffee. “We are reliably informed that the weapon to be used is a .38 handgun stolen from a local doctor’s home last month. However, we don’t know which one of you is being targeted. Can you perhaps help us out in that regard?”

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<sup>182</sup> Written by Geoff Edington.

<sup>183</sup> >\$10,000 today.

<sup>184</sup> Operated by the Delta Hotel group, deluxe corner suites then renting for \$25 per night.

It was a bit scary I suppose, but oddly exciting too. Putting our heads together, we figured maybe it had something to do with our new manager Jeff Lilly (lead-singer Geoff's brother-in-law) who had recently become romantically involved with the wife of a local Vancouver crime figure.<sup>185</sup>

“Yes, law-enforcement is familiar with that individual,” said the officer. “You are all now under police protection, and we expect full cooperation.”

“No problem,” we replied, in grateful unison. “Thanks.”

From that moment forward, there were armed police everywhere - outside our rooms, in the hotel lobby, and the parking lot. And later, during the show, there was a patrol car with lights flashing parked on each corner of the nearby venue, with cops in plainclothes sprinkled throughout the audience, and two uniformed officers standing right outside our backstage dressing room door.

“You boys just go ahead and do whatever it is musicians do to get ready for a show,” quipped one constable. “We’re here to protect you, not bust you.”

Taking the police at their word (?), we went ahead and performed our usual herbal sacraments. Downright surreal it was . . .

The show ended without incident, the crowd went home, and the officer in charge called us over.

“I was skeptical at first,” he said. “I didn’t think that a concert like this would be a good place to bump somebody off. But now, having been out in the audience with all that loud noise and flashing lights — shots could have easily gone off, and we

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<sup>185</sup> Long married Jeff and Judy Lilly, presently retired and living comfortably in the south of Spain.

wouldn't have heard a thing.”

Hmmnn? Was he kidding? Or not?

We were just about to exit the venue and return to our hotel, when the ranking Sergeant made a request.

“Gentlemen!” he said. “The Prince George RCMP detachment was wondering if you boys wouldn't mind leaving town as soon as possible.”

“No problem,” we replied. “We'll be gone first thing in the morning.”

“I'm sorry,” he said. “Perhaps you misunderstood. I meant — now!”

“But we've booked deluxe rooms . . .”

A notorious local rock band with hit records on radio, the SoTs were often called to play back-up for big-time touring rock acts like Ten Years After, Fleetwood Mac, Jethro Tull, and Rod Stewart and the Faces — routinely performing at the PNE Coliseum for large crowds,<sup>186</sup> but always in support, never headlining.

It was great fun at first, offering a tantalizing glimpse of show-biz glitz and success, but was ultimately frustrating. That's because, when the show was over, the headliners would move on to other big shows, for big audiences, in other major centres — but we'd be stuck in small-time provincial Vancouver, unable to break the bonds of our geographic isolation.

Frustration wrought varying degrees of anxiety and depression, with several

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<sup>186</sup> >10,000



seeking solace in substance abuse. Singer Geoff was the first to succumb, opiates being his intoxicant of choice. Others joined in with varying degrees of enthusiasm (myself included), and the band began its slow but steady journey towards self-destruction. (Norton, 2006)

## Driving Mr. Dixon

It was the dead of winter, and legendary bluesman Willie Dixon and his Chicago All-Stars were booked on a two-week tour of B.C.. The SoTs were hired as the back-up band — largely because we could pull in a younger crowd, but also because we both traveled with a powerful sound system and knew our way around the province's dangerous high mountain roads.

The contract was for ten shows in fourteen days, in towns like Prince George, Cranbrook, and Nelson. The trek to Kimberly, a mining community in the East Kootenays, took us up through the Kaslo-Slocan pass in the Monashee Mountains, one of the highest on the country (7500 feet), with snow piled 10 feet high on either side of the frozen pavement.

Each band traveled separately, but in convoy, as a safety precaution should one of our vehicles slide off the road into a ravine. I recall pulling into a rest-stop at the summit, and standing on a promontory chatting with Mr. Dixon, who was entranced by the alpine vista laid out before him.

“Don't have none of this where I come from,” he said. “Amazing!”

We must have seemed an odd bunch — six “mature” African American gents<sup>187</sup> traveling in a rented Chevy Clubwagon with Illinois license plates, and six skinny hippies from Vancouver driving a customized Dodge 300 van with Kenworth running lights, high-powered fog lamps, and chrome air-horns.

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<sup>187</sup> In addition to Willie Dixon on lead vocals and stand-up bass, the Chicago All-Stars were Lafayette Leake (piano), Eddie Shaw (saxophone), Buster Benton (guitar), Shakey Jake Harris (blues harp), and Clarence “Dogman” Brown (drums and equipment manager).

The weather was horrendous. Each day we'd endure blizzards, white-outs, and black ice — literally risking our lives so the show that night would go on. Typically, we'd arrive at the venue in late afternoon, and set up and sound-check the equipment. Then afterwards, before dinner (a highlight of the day), we'd sit around listening to the veteran bluesmen warm-up their instruments, and sometimes even jam along.

Though rudimentary players by today's hyper-sophisticated standards of virtuosity, the All-Star *mojo* was definitely working, and listening to them play each night was a revelation.

As a guitar player, I naturally gravitated towards Buster Benton, an auxiliary Chicago policeman looking to make a few extra dollars while on a working vacation. Unlike me, a youthful upstart traveling with a valuable collection of vintage American-made Fender and Gibson guitars, Buster's instrument of choice was a cheap Japanese knock-off.

"Why'd you-all want to waste your money on that," he scolded, eyeing my expensive gold-top Les Paul. "This here one's just as good."

Buster wasn't what you'd call a "happy go lucky" fellow. Indeed, he seemed to be in a bad mood most of the time.

"What's up Mr. Benton?" I inquired. "Something wrong?"

"It's your God damned Canadian border guards. Motherfuckers took away my pistol."

“Gee Mr. Benton,” I replied. “Folks aren’t allowed to carry handguns up here in Canada.”

“I’m a cop, dammit!” he snorted. “Got me a permit and everything! They made me leave it at the border. Had to post a \$300 bond! What kind of a country you all runnin’ here boy. Confisticatin’ a man’s piece! Sheeeit! Just ain’t right.”

“Gee Mr. Benton . . . I’m sure you won’t be needing a pistol up here.”

“We’ll see.” he muttered. “We’ll see.”

The tour rolled into Nelson, a picturesque lakeside town in the Kootenays, and the daily ritual of setting up the sound system and band gear got underway. Sitting at a table in the cafeteria of Notre Dame College,<sup>188</sup> wearing a full-length, cashmere overcoat and sporting his signature Homburg hat, Mr. Dixon beckoned me over.

“Hey kid,” he said, “I heard you last night. You plays mighty fine. Tell me somethin’. . . what do you think about the blues? Do you like to play the blues?”

“Yes sir,” I answered, pulling up a chair. “I like the blues. But I’m just a white kid from the suburbs and, except for maybe Hendrix, the only blues I’ve really heard is by those English guys, like Eric Clapton and Peter Green. So I don’t really feel qualified to play the blues. Besides, I’m not completely comfortable with the commercial appropriation of an oppressed minority’s cultural heritage.”

Willie leaned forward, and looked me straight in the eye.

“Son,” he said. “That’s a load of crap! Everybody gets the blues. The President

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<sup>188</sup> Presently Selkirk College.

of the United States? He gets the blues. The Queen of England? Mother Theresa? Everyday she gets the blues. Elvis? The Beatles? The Stones? Them too. The Romans had the blues. So did the Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Mesopotamians. Hell! Even the God damned caveman had the blues!”

I didn't know how to respond, so just sat there and listened.

“Listen kid,” he continued. “The blues don't belong to just one bunch of folks. Everybody's got a right to play the blues, and if you want to play the blues — you go right ahead.”

“Thank you sir. That means a lot, especially coming from you.”

“Damn straight,” he said. “Now just go up there — and be yourself!

“Thank you sir. I will.”

“Good! And remember — if anyone, anywhere, anytime, ever gives you hassle for playing the blues — you tell 'em Mr. Willie Dixon from Chicago, Illinois said it's all right.”

“I will sir. Thanks”

“You're welcome. Now tell me. Do you boys make records. Are you on the radio?”

“We've got one out right now,” I replied.

“Great!” he said, reaching into his briefcase to retrieve a few LPs. “Here, take these. Maybe there’s some tunes on there you’d like to record — just don’t forget to pay me the royalties — like them Zeppelin fellas did.”<sup>189</sup>

*William James “Willie” Dixon (1915-1992) was born in Vicksburg, Mississippi. In 1936, following several scrapes with the law, he decided to hitchhike north to Chicago. A large man, Willie took up boxing, winning the national Golden Gloves amateur heavyweight title at age twenty-one. His professional boxing aspirations, however, were interrupted by World War II, his determined resistance to the military draft garnering ten months imprisonment. A consummate musician (bass), songwriter, and record producer (primarily for the Chess label) — Dixon worked with and contributed greatly to the success of many blues legends, notably Muddy Waters, and Howlin’ Wolf, but also Otis Rush, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Little Walter, Sonny Boy Williamson, Koko Taylor, Little Milton, Eddie Boyd, Jimmy Witherspoon, Lowell Fulson, Willie Mabon, and Memphis Slim. (Dixon, 1977)*

*Willie Dixon’s genius lay in his ability to reframe traditional rustic Southern blues motifs in a contemporary urban context, using electric instrumentation and other modern technical innovations. Willie died of heart failure in Burbank, California in 1992 (Baldry, 2004), and was posthumously inducted into America’s Rock and Roll Hall of Fame<sup>190</sup> in 1995.*

*Prominent among his career accomplishments was his mentoring of the American Folk Blues Festival. The AFBF was an all-star musical aggregation that toured Europe annually between 1962 and 1966. Jazz had long been popular in Europe ( Shack, 2001), and American Rock & Roll was just beginning to gain a foothold with British, French, and German youth. (Loog-Oldham, 2002; 2003) Noting that both genres drew heavily upon the blues for inspiration, German jazz publicist Joachim Ernst Berend correctly reasoned that European audiences would flock to concert halls to see the original blues legends in person.*

<sup>189</sup> Later, in 1985, Willie Dixon sued Led Zeppelin, claiming that their song “Whole Lotta Love” was largely plagiarized from “You Need Love,” written by Dixon and recorded by Muddy Waters as a single for Chess Records in 1962.

<sup>190</sup> Established in Cleveland, Ohio, 1983. See URL <http://www.rockhall.com/home/default>.

*Accordingly, Frankfurt-based promoters Horst Lippmann and Fritz Rau contacted Dixon in Chicago, who assembled a stellar roster, with a view towards promoting blues music internationally. (Titon, 1993)*

*Since the height of its commercial popularity in the 1920s, the blues in America had seen mostly hard times — continued racial segregation, economic depression, and world war. Though restimulated in the postwar 1950s, notably in Memphis and Chicago, blues music eventually came to be perceived by many African Americans as a stale, dated reminder of Jim Crow, and its popularity within the black community was duly eclipsed by newer, more fashionable derivatives such as R&B, Rock & Roll, Motown, Funk, and Soul.*

*Though blues music continued to thrive in poor, working-class black neighbourhoods with B.B. King, Junior Parker, Albert King, Freddie King and others enjoying regional chart success, blues musicians in America c. 1960 generally found it difficult to get by. But Willie Dixon sensed an opportunity. “I wouldn’t have gone over [to Europe] in the first place,” he said, “had I been doing all right over here.” (Dixon, 1964; in O’Neal, 1993, 349)*

*The AFBF in 1962 traveled to London, Hamburg, Bremen, and Paris. Recorded for commercial release by Seigfried Loch and Horst Lippman, participants included: Willie Dixon, Muddy Waters, Otis Spann, Lonnie Johnson, Victoria Spivey, Big Joe Williams, John Lee Hooker Big Mama Thornton, Muddy Waters, Sonny Boy Williamson, Big Walter Horton, Buddy Guy, J.B. Lenoir, Fred McDowell, Roosevelt Sykes, Memphis Slim, and Sleepy John Estes. (Loch & Lippman, 2004)*

*AFBF audiences in London included seminal English bluesmen Alexis Korner, Long John Baldry, and John Mayall, plus Mick Jagger, Eric Burdon, Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, John Mayall, Tom Jones, John McVie, Mick Fleetwood, Rod Stewart, Steve Winwood, and Reg Dwight (Elton John) - primary movers in the subsequent British blues-rock explosion that would later yield the Rolling Stones, the Animals, Led Zeppelin, Fleetwood Mac, and many more. (Stewart, 1970; Jones, 2004; Baldry, 2004; Burdon, 1992)*

*“The 1960s was the ‘re’ decade for the blues: revival, rebirth and rediscovery . . . a decade of expansion and exploration for the music and its audiences . . . a phenomenon that was multi-dimensional, multi-directional, and multinational.” (Jim O’Neal, in Cohn, 1993, 347)*

The turnaround point on our 1972 tour with Willie was Prince George. With the night off and the evening free, he graciously invited the entire company to his premier suite at the Inn of the North for drinks, and to watch a televised prize fight featuring Smokin' Joe Frazier. The tour's American promoter<sup>191</sup> was conspicuously absent.

There we were, six white kids, barely in our twenties, sitting cross-legged on the legendary bluesman's hotel room floor watching TV as if we were in our parents' basement recreation-room.

“Look at Joe cut off the ring,” said Willie instructively, himself having been a professional middleweight. “He's in control. It'll be over soon.”

Sure enough — boom! Frazier wins . A called shot. The fight over, Willie quickly rose from the couch — not an easy task, given his considerable girth.

“Has anyone seen that promoter cat?” he inquired, glancing around the crowded suite. “The man owes me for three shows, and I ain't seen him around nowhere. Someone get him on the phone!”

Buster dialed the room number, but the line was busy.

“Hmnm,” mused Willie. “This don't feel right. Buster! Go get your piece!”

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<sup>191</sup> Hank Zevallos of Moose Valley Farms Concert Promotions.



“I ain’t got it. Them border guards took it — remember?”

“Hmmn . . . then I guess we’ll have to improvise. Where do you boys figure a guy could rent some muscle around these parts?”

Muscle? Rent? That was beyond our pay grade. Someone suggested that they try looking in the hotel’s beer parlour — a distinctly downmarket establishment operating below street level in the building’s basement.

“Are you crazy?” shot Willie. “We’s just a bunch of old fellas trying to get along in the world. This is Canada! What do you call it? The Great White North? No siree. I ain’t sendin’ any of my boys down there lookin’ for trouble.”

Then, glancing over at us, his eyes lit up.

“Listen!” he said, “You boys is from around here, plus you’re the right shade of pale. Why don’t you-all just mosey on down there and see if there’s any local fellas who wouldn’t mind throwin’ their weight around for a little green.”

Eager to assist our new mentor, SOT bass player Steve<sup>192</sup> and I got up and headed for the door.

“Don’t worry,” he assured us. “I’ll be collectin’ on behalf of you boys too.”

Now, it’s not culturally insensitive to suggest that the patronage of premises licensed to sell alcohol tends to reflect the local demographic. Accordingly, on that afternoon, in that particular northern B.C. community — the bar was full of Indians.

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<sup>192</sup> Stephen Cameron Walley (1951-2010)

Entering the smoke-filled room,<sup>193</sup> Steve and I split up, and began nervously ambling from table to table, looking for likely recruits. As if we weren't conspicuous enough (being non-native), our behaviour naturally drew additional attention. Quickly surrounded by curious customers, we found ourselves being hustled out a side door and around the corner into a loading area, shielded from public view.

A tall, thin, rugged-looking male with long, coal-black hair braided into a ponytail stepped forward wearing a red AIM<sup>194</sup> headband and a "Free Leonard Peltier" t-shirt.<sup>195</sup>

"Excuse me," he said, through characteristically clenched teeth, "But, my friends and I would like to know what it is you're doing here."

His calm demeanour was nonetheless menacing, and all I could squeak out was a pathetic . . . "Hi."

"Perhaps you didn't hear me," he said, again softly. "Who are you, and what are you doing around here?"

"Well," I mumbled, "we were just wondering if you liked the blues."

"What?!"

"The blues. Do you like the blues?"

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<sup>193</sup> Cigarette smoking was freely permitted in public places back then.

<sup>194</sup> The American Indian Movement, co-founded in 1968 by Dennis Banks, George Mitchell, Herb Powless, Clyde Bellecourt, Eddie Benton-Banai, and Russell Means *et al.*

<sup>195</sup> Imprisoned AIM activist Leonard Peltier (b.1944)

“The blues?” he squinted. “What do mean . . . do I like the fucking blues!?”

“They must be cops,” piped up a colleague. “Undercover pigs.”

“Are you pigs?” inquired the head Indian, leaning forward. “Cos we don’t like pigs nosing around our business.”

“No, seriously,” I stammered. “We were just wondering if you guys like blues music. ‘Cos if you do, we can introduce you to Willie Dixon, the Hootchie Kootchie Man himself. He’s in town you know. Playing tomorrow night. Would you like to meet him? We can arrange it. Right now if you’d like.”

The head man glanced around, silently calculating his colleagues’ enthusiasm.

It was a dicey situation. I figured it was about 50/50 that we’d wind up somewhere on the side of the highway in a bloody heap, or worse?

“Are you kidding!?” he replied, instantly dropping his guard. “Mr. Wang Dang Doodle!<sup>196</sup> Seventh Son of Seventh Son!<sup>197</sup> Shit yeah! Indians love the blues!”

“Well,” I said, finally able to breathe. “He’s getting kind of old you know, and can only handle meeting one or two folks at a time. So, if you can just grab a few friends, and quietly follow me . . .”

Entering the hotel through the main front entrance, bass man Steve ambled over to the reception desk to distract the clerk, while I snuck our friends onto the

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<sup>196</sup> Blues song, written by Willie Dixon, recorded by Howlin' Wolf, Koko Taylor, Howlin' Wolf, Grateful Dead, Savoy Brown, Box Tops, PJ Harvey, Rufus Thomas, The Pointer Sisters, The Blues Band, et al.

<sup>197</sup> Blues song, written by Willie Dixon, recorded by Willie Mabon, Mose Allison, Bill Haley, Johnny Rivers, Sting, Climax Blues Band, and Long John Baldry, et al.

express elevator up to Willie's room. Yes, back in the early 1970s, while ordinary Indians were more than welcome to spend their money downstairs in the hotel beer parlour, their presence upstairs was generally discouraged.

Willie himself opened the door. "Come in gentlemen," he said. "Can we get you something to drink?"

We all sat down, introductions were made, and there was some small talk, mostly about the Frazier fight on TV ("Man! Did you see that shot? Pow!"). Then Willie went to work.

"Listen fellas." he said. "We got ourselves a little problem here, and were wonderin' if you could maybe help us out."

"Sure, whatever you need," said the Indian. "Weed? Hash? Women?"

"It's very nice of you to offer," said Willie. "And thanks. But what we really be needin' here is a little leverage . . . if'n you know what I mean. See, the tour promoter owes me for a bunch of shows, and I'm thinkin' that he may be thinkin' about maybe skipping out on the bill."

The master continued . . .

"Now, us fellas ain't much for the hassle no more. Lafayette over there's on his last legs, Walter here has got the shakes, and Eddie . . . well, he ain't what he used to be. Plus, Buster here done forgot his piece down at the border."

"I did not!" protested Buster. "Damn! You know them guards took it."

We all chuckled. Buster too.

“And them boys over there (gesturing towards us) — well, they ain’t got no experience in this sort of thing. Besides, they’s so skinny they couldn’t be scarin’ nobody — ‘ceptin maybe their mommas.”

That one also got a good laugh.

“Here’s the thing. The man’s holed-up in his room on the top floor, and he’s likely got a few of his own people with him. So, we was just wonderin’ if you and your pals here wouldn’t mind coming along when I head up there to collect, if’n you know just what I mean.”

The Indian stood stone-faced, calmly stroking his chin.

“We would be honoured sir,” he said, nodding firmly. “It would be a privilege.”

Willie smiled, and pulled out his billfold.

“That’s not necessary sir,” said the Indian.

“Please,” said Willie, “I insist.”

“Seriously sir,” he said, looking Willie straight in the eye, “Indians love the blues.”

Born in 1915, Willie would have been around fifty-six years-old at the time (five years younger than my present sixty-one). But I was just a kid back then, with miles and miles yet to travel in the blues, so naturally he seemed much older.

Being able to chat with the man at length, and listen to his All-Stars play each night, had activated something special. Like countless impressionable conscripts before me, I'd been "recruited" into the blues army. (Becker, 1951; 1963) With my ticket to ride officially stamped, I no longer felt unworthy in the role (still don't, and never will).

The tour closed at the PNE Gardens in Vancouver, and we shook hands goodbye in the parking lot after the show.

"Don't forget son," he said, "Stay true to the blues, and the blues will stay true to you."

## The Iceman Cometh

The SoTs survived the Chicago Blues All-Stars' winter tour unscathed, and, thanks to Mr. Dixon's negotiating skills, were fairly rolling in dough. Soon we were performing at large outdoor rock festivals, alongside acts like Big Brother & the Holding Company (minus Janis Joplin, but with Nick Gravenites), and Texas bluesman Albert "the Iceman" Collins.<sup>198</sup>

Albert was outstanding. His band, a stripped-down R&B outfit featuring funk drummer Larry "Spider" Daniels, Johnny Gaydon on Fender bass, and a horn section of trumpet and tenor sax — laid down an unbelievably tight groove. His guitar playing was incredible, his vocals crisp and compelling, the lyrics cool and concise.

"That's it!" I remember thinking. "That's the way I want to play!"

*A distant relative of Lightnin' Hopkins, Albert Collins (1932-1993) was born in Leona, Texas. Raised in nearby Houston, he began recording in 1960 and released several instrumental singles, including the million selling "Frosty." In the 1965 he moved to Kansas City, Missouri, where he gained further notoriety. Moving to California in 1967, he settled in San Francisco and played many of the venues popular with the counter-culture (Winterland, Fillmore West), eventually signing with Imperial Records in 1968.*

*Signing with Alligator Records in 1978, he recorded seven albums with the label, in 1983 winning the W. C. Handy Award for "Don't Lose Your Cool," and in 1985 sharing a Grammy with Robert Cray and Johnny Copeland for the album Showdown!*

*In July 1993, after falling ill at a show in Switzerland, he was diagnosed*

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<sup>198</sup> Leona, Texas-born bluesman Albert Collins (1932 -1993), known variously as "The Iceman," and "Master of the Telecaster."

*with liver cancer, and died in August that same year. Known worldwide as “the Iceman,” and “the Master of the Telecaster,” he is fondly remembered as a blues musician of unique power, authority and wry humour.*

*I ain't drunk . . . I'm just drinkin'.*<sup>199</sup>

Albert Collins, 1986

Albert was unique, especially given his unorthodox F-minor open tuning.<sup>200</sup> Those of us who play the electric guitar conventionally (in standard tuning)<sup>201</sup> can only hope to approximate his highly unusual sound. But that was fine with me. I wasn't out to copy anyone, merely emulate.

Autumn 1972 found Albert performing at Gassy Jack's Cabaret in Maple Tree Square. I dropped by during his late-afternoon sound-check, hoping to chat in-person. Finding him sitting alone at a table near the bar, I sidled into a chair opposite and introduced myself.

“Hi Mr. Collins. I'm a big fan. Welcome to Vancouver.”

He just gave me a funny look, and ordered a glass of beer.

“How's it going?” I inquired, blathering on like a curious schoolboy. “Have you been playing a lot lately. Where did you travel in from?”

The beer arrived, Albert grunted out a “thank you,” and the waitress wandered off. Then, with no one watching (except me), he reached under the table and poured half its contents out onto the club's gaudy deep-shag carpet.

<sup>199</sup> Excerpted lyric, from “I Ain't Drunk,” written in 1954 by Oklahoma bluesman Jimmy Liggins (1922-1983), from the 1986 Alligator Records CD *Cold Snap*.

<sup>200</sup>FCFABCF (low to high).

<sup>201</sup> EADGBE (low to high).



“That’s odd,” I thought.

Reaching into his cowboy boot (a Texan after all), he pulled out a mickey of rye whiskey, and filled the glass back to the top — the mother of all boilermakers! Then, gazing up towards the ceiling as if seeking benediction, he guzzled the whole thing.

“Wow!” I said to myself. “He must be thirsty.”

“What was that you were saying kid? Where did I come in from?”

“Yes sir. Are you on tour?”

“We were just at the Esquire Show Bar in Montréal.”

“Oooh . . . Montréal. I like it there. Did you have fun?”

“Weren’t no fun at all God dammit!” he snorted.

“Why’s that,” I said, a bit taken back.

“Damn police kept hassling me! Ain’t you Canadians ever seen a black man drivin’ a Cadillac with a TV antenna before. Sheeit! What kind of crackerhead country you runnin’ here anyway boy?”

I briefly considered making some lame excuse, like “Don’t mind them, they’re French,” but thought better, and bade a respectful *adieu*.

## T-Bone Shuffle

Despite having had couple of regional hit records,<sup>202</sup> the Seeds of Time were on the decline as a viable music business entity. Lucrative gigs continued to come in, but operating costs were also correspondingly high. Our communal band house, for instance, was expensive to maintain. Plus, we had a veritable fleet of vehicles on the road. Adding up the electricity and gas, phones, fuel, musical instruments, amplifiers, and food for 5-6 (plus girlfriends, hangers-on, etc) — there wasn't much left over for individual salaries.

Granted, we enjoyed a useful symbiotic relationship with our live-in drug dealer friend (cannabis only, nothing sordid) which helped to ameliorate the monthly shortfall. But personal needs and creative aspirations, having been subsumed within the collective, were not being well attended to, and internecine tensions were starting to pull the group apart.

Musical fashion is fleeting. What's new today is old tomorrow. And the SoTs' peculiar mode of Rock & Roll nonsense was no longer cutting edge. By 1972 the "hippie rock band" concept was beginning to wear thin, and just as we psychedelic groups had earlier vanquished our greaseband predecessors — now it was our turn to roll over and expire.

*Hippie is dead!*<sup>203</sup>

Nightclubs and community centres in Vancouver were once again starting to book mainstream commercial cover bands. And disco had finally invaded the west coast, first taking hold at trendy downtown establishments like Sugar Daddy's and Gary Taylor's Show Lounge, then in the suburbs and surrounding small towns.

<sup>202</sup> "My Home Town" (1969/70, and "Cryin' The Blues " (1970/71), both on Coast Records.

<sup>203</sup> The Diggers, San Francisco (6 October 1967)

What comes around goes around. Darwin rules! It would, however, prove to be a long, drawn-out extinction. Reduced to playing five nights a week at an after-hours booze-can<sup>204</sup> behind a seedy strip-joint in Chinatown where Cheech Marin and Tommy Chong were busy perfecting routines for their forthcoming debut LP<sup>205</sup> — we nonetheless resolved to make the best of things. The work was steady, but grueling. We normally started playing around midnight, and would go till 3:00 or 4:00am. Day was night, night was day, and the world was upside down.

With bare black walls, crudely upholstered booths, a small dance floor, and a 12” riser for a stage — the Parlour was a decidedly inelegant establishment.<sup>206</sup> Traffic was typically slow, mostly street hustlers and buzzed-out stoners, but would pick up now and then.

One night around 1:00am, two black ladies and two black gents dropped in accompanied by Mark Derrick, who operated the Café Copenhåven several blocks away on Main Street. Mark was casually attired, but the other men were wearing suits and ties. And the ladies? Wow! They were all dolled up in formal gowns, with fur wraps, and glittering jewelry.

“Hmmm?” I thought, from my vantage point stage-right, “I wonder what’s going on with them . . .”

Sliding into a rear booth, they ordered a round of “dark” coffees (the club’s code word for *avec l’alcool*). We finished our set, took a break, and a few minutes later I was sitting off to the side fixing a broken guitar string when one of the ladies sashayed over.

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<sup>204</sup> An unlicensed establishment where liquor is sold unlawfully (typically beyond the normal closing times).

<sup>205</sup> Cheech and Chong, released on Ode Records in 1971.

<sup>206</sup> Operated by musician/comedian Tommy Chong’s older brother Stan, the club’s previous incarnation had been called the “Elegant” Parlour.

“You in charge?” she inquired. “You know . . . the bandleader?”

I nodded tentatively.

It was Miss Lottie!<sup>207</sup> Again, she didn’t remember me, but I knew it was her.

“Do you think my friend over there could sit in?” she said, gesturing towards her party.

I said okay, not knowing exactly what to expect, but figuring it might be fun. Lottie went back to her table, and a few minutes later returned with a diminutive, elderly fellow in tow. He didn’t have a guitar with him, so I handed him one of my several spares, and we took the stage for the second set.

She may have mentioned his name, but I didn’t catch it.

“Any of you boys know how to play the blues?” he grunted, slipping the guitar-strap over his shoulder.

“Sort of,” I said, recalling our recent brush with Willie Dixon.

Dispensing with a count, he plowed into an upbeat guitar “boogie,” all by himself.

It was a typically *blasé* late-night Parlour audience, caught up in their private quasi-criminal activities, but everyone’s eyes suddenly lit up! The man’s groove was so wide you could drive a truck through it. Though frail (and clearly intoxicated), his playing was un-Godly powerful, its authorial intensity sending sound-

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<sup>207</sup> Lottie “The Body” Graves - Detroit’s answer to Gypsy Rose Lee, the Motor City’s most famous exotic dancer, well known on the West-Coast cabaret circuit, and a regularly visitor to Vancouver c. 1945-1965 (Jones, 1992; Ross,2005)

waves through my body like nothing I'd experienced before.

“Wait a minute,” I thought . . . “I have heard this before. Yeah! It sounds a lot like Albert Collins, and he plucks his strings in the same two-finger style. He must be from Texas too!”

The band fell in behind, trying not to mess things up too much. Then he called a 12-bar shuffle entitled “One O’Clock Jump,” apparently written by some guy named “Bill Basie.”<sup>208</sup>

But I still had no idea who the fellow was. That is . . . until he paused between songs to address the audience.

“We’d like to slow things down a bit now folks, and do a little tune I wrote a long, long time ago. I’m sure the boys in the band know this one.”<sup>209</sup>

*Oh yes they call it stormy Monday, but Tuesday’s just as bad.*<sup>210</sup>

“Yikes!” I gulped. “It’s him ”

*Aaron Thibeaux “T-Bone” Walker (1910-1975) is widely held to be the “Father of the electric blues guitar.” (Dance, 1990) His 1947 composition “(They Call It) Stormy Monday” is a genre classic. The prototypical urban bluesman, Walker’s contribution to 20th century American music is incalculable. B.B.King (b.1925) freely acknowledges his deep personal influence. (Jackson, 2004) His legacy extends across the generations, from Clarence “Gatemouth” Brown (1924-2005), Albert Collins (1932-1993), Freddie King (1934-1976), and Albert King (1923-1992) through to Eric Clapton (b. 1945), Keith Richard (b. 1943),*

<sup>208</sup> Kansas City-based pianist and bandleader Count Basie.

<sup>209</sup> Facetiously implying that we’d performed less that brilliantly on previous several numbers.

<sup>210</sup> Excerpted from the song “Stormy Monday Blues”, written by Aaron “T-Bone” Walker, first recorded in 1947, and released on Black and White Records.

*Jimi Hendrix (1942-1970), Billy Gibbons (b. 1949), and Stevie Ray Vaughn (1954-1990).*

*Born in Linden, Texas of African American and Cherokee Indian descent, young T-Bone moved to Dallas, meeting and learning from seminal bluesman Blind Lemon Jefferson (1893-1929). His first record, "Wichita Falls Blues," debuted on the Columbia label in 1929, but the distinctive "electric" sound didn't emerge until 1942 when "Mean Old World" was released on fledgling Capitol Records. Chicago's Rhumboogie Club served as home base during WWII, and his biggest hit, the classic "Stormy Monday Blues," came out in 1947.*

*By the early 1960s, in spite of successful appearances at the American Folk Blues Festival in Europe, his career had slowed down, his health was declining, and few other than seniors in the black community could recall his former greatness. Dying in 1974 from a stroke at age sixty-four, Aaron "T-Bone" Walker was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. (Dance, 1990)*

Los Angeles-based T-Bone had been performing earlier that evening at local singer Ron Small's Riverqueen Nightclub on Davie Street,<sup>211</sup> and he and Lottie were old friends. Let's be clear. Lottie didn't know me from a hole in the ground. To her, our occasionally crossing paths meant less than nothing. Nevertheless, there she was again, showing up every few years like a familiar highway signpost suggesting that somehow, despite life's numberless detours and dead-ends, I just might be headed in the right direction . . .

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<sup>211</sup> The Riverqueen.

## Driftin' Blues

*Well I'm drifting and drifting, like a ship out on the sea.  
No I ain't got nobody, in the world to care for me.*<sup>212</sup>

Charles Brown, 1945

Vancouver's "Legendary Seeds of Time" finally disbanded in 1973. Singer Geoff left first, having fully succumbed to his addictive nature. Fortunately, royalties due from our 1971 hit "Cryin' the Blues" were sufficient to fund his rehabilitation back East. Otherwise, he'd be long dead.<sup>213</sup> (Norton, 2006)

Not to be judgmental here. Heavens no! Indeed, we were each well acquainted with the Beast, and quite capable of doing ourselves serious harm. But brother Geoff, it seems, was on a mission. Then, doubtless foreseeing the band's impending doom, Steve the bass player also decided to pack it in - but not before becoming a Jehovah's Witness! SoT legend holds that he went to see the 1973 film *The Exorcist* one night — and never returned. (Ibid.)

A virtual parade of substitute musicians passed through SoT ranks in its waning years and months, mainly on keyboards, drums and bass. But the act was heading nowhere, and one by one the crew began to bail. Finally, at a gig in Kelowna, with a dearth of qualified personnel to call upon, I was myself obliged to fill in as lead vocalist.

That's it . . . I quit!

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<sup>212</sup> Excerpted lyric, from Driftin' Blues, written by Charles Brown, released in 1945 on Aladdin Records.

<sup>213</sup> Primarily from commercial radio airplay royalties, collected worldwide and distributed in Canada circa 1970 by Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI), predecessor to today's Society of Composer and Music Publishers (SOCAN).

For the first time since leaving home as a sixteen year-old, I had no band. Nor did I have a girlfriend — my teenage sweetheart Cindy and I having split several months prior.

Cindy Freidman — a sultry, dark-haired Jewish girl from Toronto (a year or two younger than me but much wiser in the ways of the world) was my first true love. We'd met in Montréal and had immediately felt an intense psycho-sexual attraction. Soon after graduating from high school, she'd traveled west to join me on the coast. Following the demise of the SoT's communal band house, we'd settled into a rented urban cottage on 14th Street in North Vancouver.<sup>214</sup> But, being very young, it didn't last. Neither of us were unfaithful, that I know of. We just simply grew apart. I moved out, and she stayed (the standard connubial compromise). Too bad. It really was a lovely little house.

Being bandless for the first time since leaving school felt strange, and I hardly knew what to do with myself. Task One was to get my driver's license, something I'd been putting off for years (another vestige of having been skipped two grades ahead). Then, after selling some leftover SoT band gear, I bought my first car, a five-speed Fiat Spyder convertible. Room and board came courtesy of various gal pals around town, but the novelty soon wore off, and I slid into a semi-serious relationship with a cute blonde waitress named Darlene. But that too went south. Finally, I was reduced to temporarily sleeping on a bare mattress in my mother's basement.

*Q: What do you call a musician without a girlfriend?*

*A: Homeless!*

Musicians in bands tend to stick closely together, like a club or a gang — writing, rehearsing, performing, and socializing almost exclusively within their own core

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<sup>214</sup> \$175 per month, with a \$75 rental suite in the back to ameliorate the expense.



group. (Becker, 1951; 1957; 1982) But working with the same small occupational unit for a long period of time tends to narrow one's creative vista. You get locked into and restricted by certain routines. Being *sans orchestre* for the first time in my youthful career thus afforded the opportunity to explore artistically, and I found myself engaging a broader circle of musical friends.

The Lavin brothers, Tom and Jack, emigrated to Vancouver from Chicago in the early 1970s. I'm not certain, but their exodus may have had something to do with the war in Vietnam. Older brother Tom came first, and soon joined forces with a band of New York-based *arrivists* named Orvil Dorp.

Orvil Dorp was full of bravado. Yankee bullshit notwithstanding, they did play well, and Tom and I soon became firm allies, mixing musically and socially at happening nightspots like Rohan's Rockpile on West 4th Avenue in Kitsilano.

Though from divergent backgrounds (his Jewish parents were both academics), Tom and I shared an enthusiasm for African American music, and especially Chicago-style blues, with which he, a Windy City native, was intrinsically familiar.

When younger brother Jack (also a bass-player) arrived in town the following year Tom switched over to drums. The subsequent addition of piano man Bruce Gallagher (aka: Doc Fingers)<sup>215</sup> made us a quartet, and we went through a succession of temporary band names<sup>216</sup> before settling on the Kitsilano All-Stars.

Rohan's started life as a used-record store, but during the 1970s gradually morphed into one of the leading alternative live-music venues on Canada's west

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<sup>215</sup> Fresh from a stint with Toronto-based Arkansas Rockabilly legend Ronnie Hawkins.

<sup>216</sup> Like Ear Job, the Bug Eyed Suckers, and Fuck All From Nowhere.

coast. Proprietor Fred Xavier operated on the edge of oblivion, one step ahead of the authorities,<sup>217</sup> and two steps ahead of a certain unheavenly two-wheeled transportation oriented men's club.<sup>218</sup> Either could have shut the joint down at any time, and occasionally did. Nevertheless, our Kitsilano All-Star outfit served on-and-off as Rohan's *de facto* house-band from 1973-75.

Though only twenty-five, I'd been playing professionally for almost a decade.

*Jane Piirto (2004, 15) maintains that, in order to achieve artistic mastery, a person "must have been working in a domain for a minimum of 10 years," emphasizing the role of "master coaches and teachers."*

But I'd never had a coach or teacher, nor any lessons whatsoever. Nobody had ever shown me how to play a lick (except maybe Uncle Walter), or taught me how to read music. Everything I knew (or didn't know) about playing the electric guitar I'd figured out on my own by listening to records, or gleaned from watching others at a discrete distance.

Sure, Willie Dixon had been a seminal influence, but never once did he offer any technical instruction, just words of wisdom and encouragement. T-Bone Walker and Albert Collins made deep impressions too, but the time I spent with them in-person was fleeting and tangential.

The Kitsilano All-Stars didn't practice or rehearse together in the conventional sense. Instead we jammed — informally challenging ourselves to go further and funkier, whether in the blue-eyed soul tradition, playing tunes lifted directly from the African American canon, or our own R&B-based compositions. We weren't a "career" band as such, with long-term ambitions and goals, just a group of

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<sup>217</sup> The B.C Liquor Control Board, the Vancouver Business Licensing Commission, etc.

<sup>218</sup> Whose name need not be mentioned.

aspiring young rock musicians with “no particular place to go.”<sup>219</sup>

Then, one night, while attempting to egress the stage at Rohan’s, I inadvertently caught my foot on some shoddily installed bunting and tumbled down onto the dancefloor — hitting my head. Lying there flat on my back, gazing upwards through the muddled haze (replete with cuckoo-birds and whirling stars) — I saw an angel.

“Are you all right?” she said, offering her hand. “Can I help?”

“Thanks,” I replied, vainly trying to hide my embarrassment.

She was beautiful, the prettiest girl I’d ever seen, with long wavy hair parted in the middle *à la* Mamas and Papas singer Michelle Phillips.

“Who are you?” I mumbled, clumsily trying to pull myself into vertical alignment. “And what’s your phone number?”

I borrowed a pen, and she wrote it on my shirt. Waking up the following morning with a monstrous hangover, I called to make a date and picked her up that evening in my sporty Italian convertible. She wasn’t impressed.

“Could you put the top up please . . . I’m wearing contacts.”

*There ain’t but one kind of blues in this here world, and that’s the blues between a man and woman who’s in love.*

Son House (Attr.)<sup>220</sup>

<sup>219</sup> Song title, written by Chuck Berry, and featured on the 1964 Chess LP *From St. Louis to Liverpool*.

<sup>220</sup> Clarksdale, Mississippi-born “Delta” bluesman Eddie James “Son” House, Jr. (1902-1988),

Leslie Anne Gourlay was this working-class English immigrant musician's dream come true. We courted for several months, and it was a heavily contested affair (she already had a boyfriend). But, in the end, I won her heart, and we moved in together, eventually marrying.

There's nothing like love and marriage to get a young man thinking seriously about making money and planning for the future. Accordingly, I took gigs that I previously might have avoided, like with a country-western band on a tour of B.C. and Alberta.

Singer Dave Wall was a mellow baritone in the classic Ernest Tubb/Merle Haggard mode, and his Silver Dollar Band was, if nothing else — authentic, with seasoned sidemen drawn from across Canada. I knew the drummer socially, and he'd arranged for me to come on board.

Having never played "straight" country music before, I felt a bit like a fish out of water. Nevertheless, I found that my bluesy guitar stylings traveled well across genres. But suddenly, citing health problems, veteran Dave decided to retire, and the group disbanded.

Back to square one.

Then I got a call from a local booking agency. Rock & Roll icon Chuck Berry had been booked for a concert at the PNE Coliseum, and needed a back-up group. It was a perfect situation for the Kitsilano All-Stars. Tom was particularly excited, devouring Chuck's Greatest Hits LP and studying every nuance. A few days before the show, he phoned . . .

"I've got it!" he said.

“Got what?”

“The key to playing Chuck tunes man! It’s all in the bass drum! Heavy on the down beat — like *ba BOOM, ba BOOM, ba BOOM* . . . not the other way around!”

“Cool,” I said. “Hope you’re right.”

*Charles Edward Anderson “Chuck” Berry, born 18 October 1926 in St. Louis Missouri is a legendary African-American Rock & Roll singer, songwriter, and guitarist of unparalleled cultural significance. With songs such as “Maybellene” (1955), “Roll over Beethoven” (1956), “Rock and Roll Music” (1957) and “Johnny B. Goode” (1958), with lyrics astutely focusing on teenage life and 1950s-era American consumerism, he helped refine and develop R&B into a viable, mainstream musical genre.*

*Raised in a middle-class black neighbourhood, his father was a contractor and a deacon of a nearby Baptist church, and his mother an elementary school principal. His gift for music emerged at an early age, performing publicly for the first time while a student at Sumner High School.*

*But he was troubled as a youth. In 1947, after serving a three-year prison sentence for armed robbery, he settled into married life with secure employment at an automobile assembly plant. By early 1953, however, he was performing nightly in St. Louis with the Johnnie Johnson Trio.*

*Heavily influenced by Texas bluesman T-Bone Walker, Chuck’s big break came in 1955 when he recorded “Maybellene” (an R&B adaptation of the hillbilly country song “Ida Red”) featuring Johnnie Johnson on piano, Jerome Green (from Bo Diddley’s band) on the maracas, Jasper Thomas on the drums and Willie Dixon on the upright bass. Released on Chicago-based Chess Records, it sold over a million copies, reaching #1 on Billboard’s R&B chart.*

*By the end of the 1950s, Chuck was an established star with numerous hit records and film appearances to his credit, a lucrative touring career, and a*

*successful St. Louis nightclub called Berry's Club Bandstand. In December 1959, however, he was sentenced to five years in prison for offenses under the Mann Act, alleging that he had transported a 14-year-old girl across state lines to work at his club as a prostitute.*

*Following his release in 1963, he had several more hits, including "No Particular Place To Go," "You Never Can Tell," and "Nadine," but these did not achieve quite the same level of success. Hobbled by the advent of the Beatles, the Stones, and other fashionable British Invasion imports, and further impeded by the emergence in the late 1960s of hippie counterculture and psychedelia, by the 1970s he was more in demand as a nostalgic live performer, playing his past hits with local backup bands of highly variable quality.*

*His insistence on always being paid in cash led to a conviction in 1979 for income tax evasion, for which he was sentenced to four months in prison and 1000 hours of community service. Chuck Berry is now in his eighties, and continues to perform at home in St. Louis, elsewhere in the U.S., and in Europe where he enjoys continuing popularity. (Cohn, 1993; Pegg, 2005)*

The Kitsilano All-Stars arrived for Chuck's show at the PNE Coliseum an hour early. Shown to our dressing room, with plenty of time to spare, we unfastened a mirror from the wall, and began digging into a mountain of marching powder. The opening act went on, then the second warm-up band . . . and still no sign of Chuck. The promoter was beginning to get nervous, and kept glancing at his watch. Finally, barely minutes before curtain, the man himself showed up, driving an airport rental car.

"Who's in charge?" he barked, "and where's my money?" The promoter promptly identified himself, and the two wandered off to quickly settle up. Then, with financial details taken care of (and his wallet literally bulging with cash), Chuck retrieved his guitar case from the car's trunk and turned to us.

“Are you guys the band?”

“Yes sir!” we chirped, in respectful unison.

“Good. Then follow me.”

Repairing to a tiny service room (more like a broom closet), we closed the door behind us for privacy.

“Which one of you is the bass-player?”

Jack nodded.

“Okay then, now listen . . . whenever I turn around and give you a buggy-eyed look, I want you to stay playing on one note only — like boom, boom, boom, boom. Got it!”

“No problem,” said Jack.

“Good. Now, when I raise up my leg like this . . . and stomp my foot down real hard. I want you-all to stop playing. Got it!”

“No problem,” we replied, as one.

Chuck paused for a second, staring us straight in the eyes. Yup. We were as high as kites, ripped to the nuts on nose-candy — and he knew it.

“You boys is too cool,” he chuckled. “This here’s goin’ to be a breeze.”

We went out and knocked off forty red-hot minutes to raucous response. And Chuck dug it too. We could tell — he actually looked happy (not something the man is well-known for). Tom smiled over at me from behind the drums between songs as if to say, “I told you so.” He was right. We were really good.

While Chuck remained alone on stage to play his 1972 novelty hit “My Ding-a-ling,” the All-Stars repaired to the dressing room for another snort. Then, returning with a vengeance, we rattled off forty more dynamite minutes — hit after hit: “Memphis,” “Sweet Little Sixteen,” “Johnny B. Goode” — each rendered in similar tiptop form. He pulled some odd ones too, with irregular changes, like “Havana Moon” and “Brown Eyed Handsome Man,” even spontaneously adding a slow down-and-dirty blues — “It’s a Mean Old World,” by the legendary Little Walter Jacobs<sup>221</sup> (which he sang surprisingly well). And, to top things off, he gave me not one but TWO extended guitar solos — an unanticipated honour.

Between songs, he bantered with the audience, inviting questions.

“Hey Chuck!” someone yelled, “I bet you don’t even know the names of the guys in your band” (a pointed reference to his habit of hiring inexperienced local players).

Chuck stiffened.

“What do you mean?!” he said, feigning insult. “Of course I know the names of the guys in my band! Over there — that’s the piano man. That guy is the bass man. Back there is the drummer man. And this here young fella (putting his arm around me) — is the guitar man!

<sup>221</sup>Louisiana-born Marion Walter Jacobs (1930 -1968), seminal “Chicago-style” blues harmonica player and singer.



## Rez Blues

The Sunrise Hotel beer parlour, aptly named because it opened every day at 8:00am,<sup>222</sup> used to be situated on the corner of Hastings Street and Columbia Avenue, deep in heart of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Known as a "red bar," due to its predominantly First Nations clientele, it was considered one of the roughest joints in town. A solo gig, with one lone performer hired to entertain its several hundred nightly patrons, very few non-native musicians dared sign on.

Consequently, it paid triple-scale.

Leslie and I had been looking for ways to fund a belated honeymoon in Hawaii. So, when the offer of an extended engagement at the Sunrise came up, despite some initial misgivings, I accepted.

Setting up my guitar amp and microphone on the opening evening, I felt a tap on my shoulder. Turning around, I found myself face-to-chest with an enormous native fellow.

"You the new guy eh?" he said, through characteristically clenched teeth.

"Yeah, that's me," I replied, busily straightening out some errant speaker cables.

"The last guy didn't last too long, you know?"

"Yeah, I heard. What happened?"

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<sup>222</sup> The Sunrise Hotel was purchased by the City of Vancouver in the 1990s, renovated, and turned into subsidized housing. .

“Oh nothing. Just a little misunderstanding.”

“What about?”

“Oh nothing.”

“What do you mean . . . ‘Oh nothing?’”

“Listen little buddy,” he whispered, leaning forward. “It can get a bit dangerous around here. But don’t worry. If anybody gives you a hard time, we’ll just take him outside — and kill him.”

“Oh good!” I thought, thinking it was a joke. “Protection.”

The first evening (a Monday) was fairly uneventful, but sure enough, around closing time, this extremely drunk older white fellow staggers off the dance floor and accidentally bumps into my microphone, briefly interrupting my performance. Having been challenged on stage numerous times before in my career, this was nothing, a minor inconvenience at the very worst. Nevertheless, true to his word, my protector comes over, grabs the guy by the scruff of the neck, and runs him face-first into the jukebox. Then, hovering over the man’s crumpled remains, he boots him in the gut for good measure and drags him out the back door into the alley.

“Please don’t kill him,” I pleaded. “Not on my account anyway.”

In addition to drawing customers from the “urban Rez”<sup>223</sup> the Sunrise attracted visiting out-of-towners from rural reserves as far afield as Bella Coola, Anahim

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<sup>223</sup> Local First Nations like the Squamish and Musqueam,

Lake and Sicamous. Country people tend to like their music country-style, and my leftover Silver Dollar Band repertoire of old-school C&W standards more or less fit the bill. The first week went okay, and the second even better. Curiously, over the course of the engagement I found that, in addition to enjoying up-beat dance tunes, they especially liked the sad songs, like “Blues Eyes Cryin’ in the Rain” by Willie Nelson, and “Heartaches by the Number” by Guy Mitchell.

*Well I’ve got heartaches by the number, troubles by the score  
Every day you love me less, each day I love you more<sup>224</sup>*

Dying songs were popular too, particularly “Green Green Grass of Home” by Tom Jones. And drinking songs, like “Wasted Days and Wasted Nights” by Freddy Fender. Jailhouse tunes also went over big, like “Folsom Prison Blues” by Johnny Cash. But, what really got them going were the executioner ballads, like “Silver Wings” and “Sing me Back Home” by Merle Haggard. It seemed like everyone in the place had recently lost a loved-one to internecine violence, or a drug overdose, and either knew someone in prison, or had themselves served time.

Indeed, the more depressing the song — the bigger the tip, with people routinely wandering up to the stage waving \$5 bills, bawling and wailing and begging me to “play that one again mister . . . puleeeze!” But these were poor folks, living on the social and economic margins of society, and it was hard to take their money.

Typically, however, they’d insist.

I soon became a fixture on the scene, a fan favourite if you will. Never once did feel personally threatened. In fact, folks were very nice to me. But generations of oppression and exploitation of native people by mainstream white society had

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<sup>224</sup> Written in 1959 by Harlan Howard.

exacted a harsh toll, and every evening, like clockwork, they'd get drunk and beat the living crap out of each other.

The Sunrise was a sort of First Nations destination resort, attracting aboriginal visitors from all across B.C. and Western Canada. Sadly, I recall this one fellow, a quiet, bookish North Saskatchewan Cree, in town for a native education conference at UBC. Early in the week, clearly mindful of his responsibilities, he drank little and we chatted soberly at length during my breaks. Later in the week, however, having returned each subsequent evening to socialize with his new found big city friends, he was shit-faced by the second set. Seriously polluted by week's end, when the bar closed on Saturday night, he was found face-down on the sidewalk outside, lying in a pool of his own blood — stabbed to death.

Bearing witness to that sort of carnage from the safety of my onstage vantage point was difficult — not dangerous, just depressing. The engagement itself lasted for several months, during which, in addition to developing a sense of occupational invincibility, I gained an enhanced appreciation for the Red Man's blues. I also earned enough to finance Leslie's and my belated Hawaiian honeymoon.

Time for this here cowpoke to mosey along . . .

## That's Entertainment

Hawaii in 1976 was a fairly affordable holiday destination for Canadians, with our currencies trading pretty much at par. Leslie, having visited there before, astutely arranged for a two-day stop-off in Waikiki to work up a pre-tan. Then, safely pigmented, we took the thirty minute flight over to Maui (the Garden Isle), and the picturesque tourist village of Lahaina, where we'd booked a corner room at the historic marina-side Pioneer Inn.

We arrived early, a few hours before check-in time, and the room's previous occupant was slow in vacating. So, while famous folk-rock singer Neil Young squared up his staggeringly expensive \$17 per-night bill, Leslie and I lingered outside on the *lanai*, sipping pineapple *daquiris*.

Our room was directly above the hotel bar. The resident boogie-master, New Orleans piano man David Paquette, was on holiday that month, but his temporary replacement was none other than fellow Kitsilano All-Star alumnus Doc Fingers.<sup>225</sup> The Pioneer was the local Lahaina hotspot, and patrons during our stay that month included two Fleetwood Macs,<sup>226</sup> one vacationing Eagle,<sup>227</sup> septuagenarian film star Buddy Ebsen, and sailor-mouthed *M.A.S.H* movie actress Sally Kellerman.<sup>228</sup> Beatle George was thought to live nearby, but didn't show. Ditto jazzman George Benson.

It was was my very first real vacation. Sure, I'd traveled a lot as a musician, but that was always work-related, never purely recreational. This trip was different.

More than a holiday, it was our honeymoon, a rite of passage heralding a new

<sup>225</sup> Bruce Gallagher.

<sup>226</sup> John and Christine McVie (then married) owned a place north of town in Napili.

<sup>227</sup> Original band member, guitarist Bernie Leadon.

<sup>228</sup> "Hot Lips" Houlihan.

stage in life for both of us.

Leslie and I returned from Hawaii with happy tans and rejuvenated spirits. We were both twenty-six years-old, and having children was definitely part of our future, so we set to work trying to establish some semblance of family stability (no easy task in the music business). Drawing on her experience working for the Keg & Cleaver restaurant chain, Leslie secured employment as day-manager at Rohan's Rockpile, responsible for balancing the books, making the payroll, scheduling staff, and placing the daily liquor order. The work was steady, and the pay — decent.

In the months prior to going to Hawaii, I'd been busy working on a commercial recording project, the idea being to purposefully pursue music business success (traditionally calculated in terms of record sales, radio airplay, and concert revenues).

The late Bruce Fairbairn (1949-1999)<sup>229</sup> was a decent trumpet player. But, with a Masters Degree from UBC in Urban Planning, he was also a far-seeing and well organized self-promoter. For years, in addition to learning how to play the blues, I'd dreamed of becoming a rock star, and Bruce had always wanted to be a successful, big-time record producer. So, when mutual pal George Lambert suggested that the two of us collaborate, interesting things began to happen.

Together with songwriter/drummer Jim Vallance, we crafted a repertoire of catchy original tunes, recruited a lead-singer (Ron Tabak) and rounded up a crew of capable musicians willing to work “on spec” or at a reduced rate. Bruce then struck a similarly symbiotic arrangement with Mushroom Studios,<sup>230</sup> and several

<sup>229</sup> *De facto* leader of the mid-1960s Vancouver R&B “greaseband” The Spectre (see <pnwb.com>)

<sup>230</sup> The organization behind the 1975 success of the Seattle-based rock band Heart. Featuring sisters Ann and Nancy Wilson, Heart's triumphant debut LP *Dreamboat Annie* was released on Mushroom Records in 1975.

months later . . . the album was finished.

Impressed with Fairbairn's acumen as a producer, local music business maven Bruce Allen (fresh from masterminding the global success of Bachman Turner Overdrive)<sup>231</sup> jumped on the bandwagon. Then, armed with Allen's invaluable endorsement, Fairbairn flew off to New York, Toronto, and L.A. to pitch our nascent (and as yet un-named) project to all the major record labels.

The rest of us waited patiently at home, with full faith in Fairbairn's powers of persuasion. In the meantime, however, we still had to make a living. Vallance, for instance, was a talented session drummer, and highly sought after on the local radio advertising jingle scene. My *forté*, on the other hand, was down-and-dirty, electric guitar driven, blues-based Rock & Roll.

So, what did I do? Naturally, I formed a C&W band. We called it the Haywire Country Combo, and did tunes by all the greats, from Hank Williams to Hank Thompson, George Jones, Merle Haggard, and Waylon Jennings. It may have been white cracker-head music to some, but it sure felt like the blues to me.

*I keep my nose on the grindstone, and I work hard every day  
Might get a little tired on the weekend, after I draw my pay  
But I'll go back workin on Monday, get right back with the crew  
And drink a little beer in the evening, sing a little bit of these working  
man blues.*<sup>232</sup>

Merle Haggard, 1969<sup>233</sup>

<sup>231</sup> Featuring brothers Randy and Robbie Bachman, Fred Turner, and Blair Thornton. Their hit tune "You Ain't Seen Nothin' Yet" (on Mercury Records) was #1 on the Billboard Hot-100 chart worldwide in 1974.

<sup>232</sup> Excerpted lyric, from "Working Man Blues," written and released on Capitol Records in 1969 by Merle Haggard.

<sup>233</sup> Bakersfield, California-born Merle Ronald Haggard (b.1937), iconic 1970s-era American country-western singer-songwriter.

It was the Autumn of 1977, and Albert Collins (my *numero uno* guitar hero) was booked to play a week-long engagement at Rohan's Rockpile. I'd seen Albert perform a number of times over the years; and had chatted with him too, but never before had the honour of accompanying him onstage. Rohan's, however, was my home court, so I approached him early in the week and he graciously invited me to sit in for the last set on Saturday night.

The Haywire Combo had another gig booked that same evening, at the Lynnwood Hotel by the North Shore docks. It concluded around 11:00pm, however, so I had plenty of time to pack up my gear and shoot across town for Albert's midnight set (where I had an amplifier all plugged-in and ready to go). And, just to be sure, I'd arranged a ride with singer Alta Gray in her VW Beetle.

Final intermission at the Lynnwood found the band sitting together at a table near the stage.

"What's up man?" said the bass player. "Doing anything later?"

"Hell yeah!" I said, all jacked-up and excited. "I'm headed over to Rohan's to play the last set with AC — and I'm totally stoked!"

"Better be careful," he said, mischievously.

"Why?"

"Well . . . I put a blotter of acid<sup>234</sup> in the beer you just guzzled."

"Bullshit!" I said, figuring it to be a joke.

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<sup>234</sup> LSD-25



“You’ll see,” he muttered.

Sure enough, we took the stage for the final set, and the tell-tale signs of argot-induced psychosis soon became glaringly apparent. The house lights began to shimmer and strobe, and the sound system started zooming in and out of phase. Cutting the performance short (while I still had my wits), I somehow managed to pack up and load my guitars into the car. I might have been more angry with my prankster colleague, but was instead preoccupied with getting to Rohan’s — both on time and in tune.

Racing across the 2nd Narrows Bridge, we careened past New Brighton Park, the Racetrack, and the PNE Exhibition grounds. Downtown was a kaleidoscope of light, pulsating and throbbing, and I was getting higher by the minute.

Finally, we pulled up to the curb in front of Rohan’s. The joint was grossly overpacked, with a lineup extending up 4th Avenue and around the corner onto Stephens Street. The doorman, a heavy-set biker dude with whom I’d (thankfully) thought to make prior arrangements, helped me out of Alta’s tiny Bug.

“Fucking bass-player spiked my beer!” I blathered.

Hanging on to his coattails tightly, and hallucinating like mad, I somehow made it through the crowd into the club, and on to the stage. A roadie then guided me across to my waiting amp.<sup>235</sup> Albert, already tuned-up and ready to roll, nodded a quick four-count, then tore into a blistering, up-tempo “Frosty.”<sup>236</sup> I was seriously bent, but played great, the LSD coursing through my veins rendering no apparent deleterious effects. If anything — it served to intensify the experience (doubtless

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<sup>235</sup> A rare Fender “Quad Reverb” - just like Albert’s.

<sup>236</sup> A 1962 million-selling instrumental single for Collins on Hall-Way Records (Beaumont, Texas).

rendering it more memorable).

Albert dug it too, tossing me a number of solos (notably on “Sex Machine”), and was warmly complimentary afterwards. Needless to say, I was thrilled to bits.

*Many white blues performers who, we are told, bring their own “authenticity” to their craft, display a mad craving for approval from black listeners and black artists . . . If white blues is autonomous and self-authenticating [as purported to be], why is black approval needed?*

Paul Garon (1995; 2005)<sup>237</sup>

Honestly, it wasn’t “black” approval that meant so much to me that evening. Rather, like anyone seeking corroboration of their capabilities, whether in art, business, sport, or education — it was the master’s expert endorsement that I was after.

Fairbairn returned from New York with tremendous news. The act (now going by the name PRiSM) had been picked up by Ariola Records in the United States,<sup>238</sup> and by GRT in Canada.<sup>239</sup> Then, surprisingly, before ever having performed live on stage as a group — our first single “Spaceship Superstar”<sup>240</sup> charted top-ten coast-to-coast in Canada, reaching #1 in several major markets.

“It’s gonna take a lot of time, travel, and hard work,” said Fairbairn. “But it’s a solid shot at the big prize — are you in?”

<sup>237</sup> Like many quotes cited in the dissertation, the above is referenced from an unpaginated online source.

<sup>238</sup> Founded in 1975, Ariola America (also known as Ariola and Ariola-Eurodisc) was the U.S. subsidiary of the German-based BMG record label, which is today controlled internationally by the Sony Music Entertainment Corporation.

<sup>239</sup> Canadian subsidiary of General Recorded Tape (GRT) a defunct American label which owned Chicago-based Chess Records from 1969 to 1975 (purchased from Leonard and Phil Chess for \$6.5m).

<sup>240</sup> Written by Jim Vallance under the pseudonym Rodney Higgs.

At twenty seven years-old — I wasn't getting any younger. Newly married, with family responsibilities on the horizon, I had to make a seriously important decision. Sure, it was a deliberately contrived, shamelessly commercial pop-music project, and nothing at all like “the blues” — but hey . . .

“It's now or never!” I rationalized. “A real chance at show-biz success.”

So, with eyes wide open, and fingers tightly crossed, I signed on for the duration.

PRiSM's first two shows were in Portland and Seattle backing up the Anglo-American band Foreigner,<sup>241</sup> followed by a headline slot at the PNE Coliseum in Vancouver. Daunted by the prospect of endless touring, drummer Vallance quickly left the fold, preferring instead to remain home and nurture his studio career. But former Seeds of Time drummer Rocket Norton was immediately taken on board as his replacement.

Our first serious foray into the U.S. market was in Washington, D.C., third on the bill to the Seattle-based group Heart. From there we went to Chicago's far North End and a show with the J. Geils Band at the fabled Aragon Ballroom (after which Tom Lavin and I jammed at Kingston Mines, a blues bar near famed Wrigley Field). Then it was the Royal Oak Theatre in Detroit backing up Joe Cocker, followed by Keil Auditorium in St. Louis with Tower of Power.

1978 began in Santa Monica, California, where we picked-up our brand-new tour bus, a sleek Atlanta-based Golden Eagle<sup>242</sup> with Georgia license plates and all the latest high-tech bells and whistles. For the next two years we performed non-stop, from coast-to-coast, in every Canadian province, most American states, and

<sup>241</sup> Following their debut 1977 hit “Cold as Ice,” released on Atlantic Records, written by Lou Gramm and Mick Jones.

<sup>242</sup> Built (since 1974) by Eagle International Inc. of Brownsville, Texas.

virtually every major U.S. city.

Usually we played in support of currently popular bands like Styx on their “Grand Illusion” tour, or Meatloaf on his maiden “Bat Out of Hell” excursion. Now and then, however, we’d branch out and do our own independent concerts, and especially in Canada where we were most successful.

In due course I learned a few things about the music industry. About agents, lawyers, publicists, and accountants. About police, security guards, limousine drivers, and labour unions (AFof M, Teamsters, and IATSE).<sup>243</sup> About record companies, record executives, A&R people,<sup>244</sup> producers, promoters, radio programmers, and on-air personalities. And about making records: compression, equalization, noise reduction, microphone placement, distortion management, and Dolby. Plus disc mastering, vinyl pressing, point of purchase retail, rack-jobbing, and wholesale distribution.

Then, of course, always lurking behind the scenes, there was the criminal element, the thick-necked guys with flashy gold jewelry, Porsches, Bentleys, and Rolls Royces — plus the booze, the women, the drugs, the money laundering, and “payola” (the 1970s version of which involved cocaine, not cash).<sup>245</sup>

PRiSM played loud and proud in the gilded rock-star fashion of the day, and the adulation received was well enjoyed. Nevertheless, despite the glamour and the ego-boosting rewards, I rather missed the down-and-dirty blues highway.

Touring the American heartland nonetheless left me with a solid geographic

<sup>243</sup> The International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees.

<sup>244</sup> Acronym for “Artist and Repertoire,” traditionally the record company department dedicated to producing musical product.

<sup>245</sup> In 1958, influential New York DJ Allen Freed was indicted for accepting bribes from record companies to play specific records, and for unfairly promoting records which paid him royalties as co-writer (notably “Maybellene” by Chuck Berry).

sense of how blues music had initially come into existence. For example, I remember traveling down from St. Louis, Missouri on I-55, and entering Memphis, Tennessee from across the river in Arkansas. We stayed at the upscale Rivermont Hotel, perched high on a bluff above the Mississippi.

*Help me, information, get in touch with my Marie.  
She's the only one who'd phone me here from Memphis, Tennessee.  
Her home is on the south side, high up on a ridge,  
Just a half a mile from the Mississippi bridge.<sup>246</sup>*

Memphis in 1978 remains memorable for a number of reasons. First, it was my very first trip to the American South. Second, it was very, very hot (100° F. at midnight) and unbearably muggy. Third, the Memphis Police Department was on strike, with a citywide 11:00pm curfew and streets patrolled by the Tennessee National Guard. Fourth, it was the first anniversary of Elvis Presley's death,<sup>247</sup> and the town was full of heartbroken housewives from around the globe. And finally, to top things off, our hotel was home-base for the annual Southern Black Gospel Quartet Convention, with the elevators and hallways positively ringing with Godly vocals.

*There'll be peace in the valley for me . . . dear Lord.<sup>248</sup>*

Rev. Thomas A. Dorsey, 1939<sup>249</sup>

PRiSM's management felt it prudent to bring us home every several months to write and record our follow-up albums.<sup>250</sup> Amen! With a baby on the way (son Beau, our first of three) this was particularly important for Leslie and me.

<sup>246</sup> Excerpted lyric, from "Memphis" written by Chuck Berry, released in 1959 on Chess Records.

<sup>247</sup> 16 August 1977

<sup>248</sup> Excerpted lyric, from "Peace in the Valley," written in 1939 by Thomas A. Dorsey. Originally composed for Mahalia Jackson, it was a hit in 1951 for Red Foley and the Sunshine Boys, becoming first Gospel recording to sell over a million copies.

<sup>249</sup> Thomas Andrew Dorsey (1899-1993). Known as "the father of gospel music," Dorsey began his lengthy and illustrious career as boogie-woogie piano player Georgia Tom."

<sup>250</sup> Our contract called for a fresh LP every 18 months.

And, given my male forebears' rather dubious performances in the role (pp23-25), I was especially determined to be a responsible, loving parent.

The Ankor Bar was a trendy Casablanca-style nightspot on the easternmost edge of Vancouver's Gastown district. Nightly entertainment there typically featured an imported African American piano player/singer (preferably elderly) backed by a local trio.

The gig paid surprisingly well for a local establishment, and it was great fun too. Drummer Chris "the Wrist" Nordquist from Edmonton was a good pal. And Pittsburgh-born bass man Wyatt "Bull" Ruther, having performed with the likes of Dave Brubeck, Errol Garner, Buddy Rich, Chico Hamilton and Miles Davis *et al*, was a seriously credentialed jazzier.

So, between 1978 and 1980, whenever not on tour with PRiSM, I made a decent wage performing with seminal jazz/blues piano greats like Sammy Price,<sup>251</sup> Jay McShann,<sup>252</sup> Laffeyette Leake,<sup>253</sup> Dorothy Donegan,<sup>254</sup> Lloyd Glenn,<sup>255</sup> and "Big Joe" Duskin.

Big Joe<sup>256</sup> (1923-2007), the son of a hard-core Southern Baptist preacher from Cincinnati, was a relatively late-blooming professional.

"I promised my father that I'd hold off playing boogie-woogie music for a living until after he died," he said, "but I didn't figure on the old man living to be a hundred and four!"

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<sup>251</sup> 1908-1992

<sup>252</sup> 1916-2006

<sup>253</sup> 1919-1990

<sup>254</sup> 1922-1998

<sup>255</sup> 1909-1985

<sup>256</sup> Known by pals as "Dusky." His pet name for me was "Windy" (a mispronunciation of "Lindsay")

A mature rookie, in his mid-fifties but just getting started in the business, Joe played in the old-school, barrelhouse style of Albert Ammons<sup>257</sup> and Johnny Johnson.<sup>258</sup> A big man, with massive hands — his touch on the piano keyboard was contrastingly feather light. He played all the standard jazz and blues tunes, plus a few unusual ones — like “North of Alaska” (sic) a piano-boogie inspired by white country-western singer Johnny Horton’s 1960 hit.<sup>259</sup>

“How come you do that one Joe?” I asked. “That’s pure cracker-head C&W.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I just heard it on the radio way back and dug it.”

“You used to listen to country music radio? In Cincinnati?”

“Yeah, back in the 50s. We all did.”

“In the black community?”

“Sure, why not? It’s all the same. Good tunes is good tunes.”

Joe’s performance was peculiar in another respect. Despite being highly skilled and experienced, he’d occasionally lose track of the beat. Not the overall rhythm, which remained constant and forceful throughout. But he’d drop bars, or half-bars, and sometimes in the oddest places. Consequently, some of his twelve-bar tunes would turn out to be eleven and a half or thirteen metric units long. Accordingly, I learned that things don’t have to be absolutely perfect in order to

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<sup>257</sup> Chicago-born Albert Ammons (1907 -1949) was a seminal African American boogie-woogie pianist.

<sup>258</sup> West Virginia-born Johnnie Clyde Johnson (1924 - 2005) was an African American boogie-woogie piano player and blues musician, noted for his work for Sun Records of Memphis), and in particular for his contribution to the Chuck Berry *oeuvre*.

<sup>259</sup> Los Angeles born, Texas raised John Gale Horton (1925-1960), American country-wester singer best known for “saga songs” like “North to Alaska,” “The Battle of New Orleans,” and “Sink the Bismark.”

be absolutely wonderful.

PRiSM was a huge commercial success c.1980.<sup>260</sup> Our first three LPs had gone triple-platinum in Canada, winning back-to-back Juno Awards<sup>261</sup> and setting records for domestic sales. On the road, our time was divided between Canada, where we headlined coast to coast and thus realized tidy profit, and the United States, where we continued to labour in a back-up role.

Eagerly anticipating the arrival of a substantial royalty cheque from GRT Records, Leslie and I went house hunting, and found a lovely 4-bdrm home in Vancouver's leafy Dunbar neighbourhood. It had a fully finished in-law suite for her elderly mother, French windows opening off the master bedroom onto a south facing deck, and a spacious tree-lined back yard — for \$90,000.<sup>262</sup> Our offer was accepted, with a decent period for completion. Then, fully confident in our family's financial future, I went back out on the road with the band.

Our next performance was in Montréal, at the fabled Forum<sup>263</sup> on the southeast corner of *rue Atwater et Ste-Catherine* (a dream come true for any red-blooded Canadian hockey fan).

In stark contrast to the Seeds of Time's humble accommodations a decade earlier, this time we were booked into the 5-star Ritz Carleton à *1228 rue Sherbrooke Ouest*, with a limousine reserved for our private use — 24hrs a day (just in case).

Arriving in town on the day of the show, we were (as usual) greeted at the airport by a phalanx of record company representatives, then escorted downtown to

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<sup>260</sup> Not so much in the USA.

<sup>261</sup> Canada's version of the Grammy, for "Best Album" (1979) and "Best Group" (1980).

<sup>262</sup> Likely worth around \$1.5 million today.

<sup>263</sup> Home to the NHL's Montreal Canadiens from 1926-1996.



popular English-language FM radio station CHOM for an on-air promotional interview.

The station manager bade us warm welcome. “*Bonjour*,” he said. “Please sit down.”

“Thanks for having us.” I said. “*Merci!*”

“I’m afraid we have something rather distressing to tell you,” he continued, glancing tentatively around at his colleagues.

“*Pardonnez-moi.*”

“There’s been a death threat.”

“You’re kidding?!”

“Seriously! No joke! Our receptionist received several phones earlier today indicating that somebody in PRiSM is going to get shot, on stage, at the Forum, tonight!”

“*Sacre bleu!*” I exclaimed, invoking the venerable Yogi.

*It’s like deja-vu — all over again!*”<sup>264</sup>

Informed of our arrival, a senior Metro Police officer stopped by the station to advise us regarding security.

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<sup>264</sup> One of many quirky quotes attributed to legendary St. Louis, Missouri-born baseball legend Lawrence Peter “Yogi” Berra (b. 1925)

“Henceforth!” he declared. “You are under our protection.” *Comprenez?*”

Our limousine back to the Ritz-Carleton was accompanied by officers on motorcycles, and the hotel lobby, elevators, and hallways were also closely guarded. Similarly, our hospitality suite at the Forum (adjacent to *les Canadiens*’ dressing room) was brimming with uniformed interlopers.

“When the shooting starts,” offered one particularly sarcastic, kevlar-vested, Uzi-toting SWAT cop, “just duck behind your amps . . . ”

But just like before in Prince George — nothing happened (no shots, no injuries, no fatalities). This time, however, we were allowed to linger overnight in 5-star splendour. I called Leslie the next morning. Apparently she’d received a couple of late-night “heavy breathing” phone calls. Ditto the keyboard player’s girlfriend. We figured it was a prank, and pretty much forgot about it.

That is, until . . .

**The New York Times: 8 December 1980**

Beatle John Lennon Slain: Shot Down Outside  
New York Apartment . . .

We were in Toronto when John Lennon was killed, staying at the dowager Royal York Hotel. A memorial gathering was hastily convened at Nathan Phillips Square, and coverage blanketed the local TV and radio news. Naturally curious, I ran down to the lobby and jumped into one of the band’s ever-ready limousines.

Entering the plaza, the driver idled curbside so I could get out and mingle with the crowd of several thousand listening to seminal English blues-rock singer Long

John Baldry (then a resident of Toronto) pay emotional public tribute to his fallen comrade . . .

We performed the following evening at similarly storied Maple Leaf Gardens,<sup>265</sup> then worked our way incrementally westward, headlining all the exotic hotspots like Thunder Bay, Brandon, Regina, and Prince Albert.

Business was booming in Canada. America, however, was a tougher nut to crack. So, once again we hit the U.S interstate highway system.

*Stoking the star-maker machine, behind the popular song.*<sup>266</sup>

Joni Mitchell, 1974<sup>267</sup>

Circumnavigating the continent several times, we played with just about every happening act at the time — from AC/DC to Blue Oyster Cult and Cheap Trick. In Pittsburgh we headlined outdoors for 5,000 at the City Zoo, then Fox Theatre in Atlanta (the heart of Jimmy Carter’s “New South”) and the Warner in Washington, D.C. — directly across the street from the White House.

At an outdoor fest in Charlotte, North Carolina, we backed up bleach-blonde disco-maven Alicia “I Love the Nightlife” Bridges. And Laffeyette, Louisiana found us performing at a roadhouse down by the *bayou*, where the previous evening’s entertainment had been a standup comedy debate between LSD guru Timothy Leary and former FBI agent (and convicted Watergate conspirator) G. Gordon Liddy. Seriously, once again . . .

<sup>265</sup> Home of the Toronto Maple Leafs NHL hockey club. Still standing today (but little used), it was built by Maple Leafs managing director Conn Smythe in 1931 at a cost of \$1.5 million.

<sup>266</sup> Excerpted lyric, from “Free Man in Paris” by Joni Mitchell, on the 1974 Asylum Records LP *Court and Spark*.

<sup>267</sup> Ft. MacCleod, Alberta-born Roberta Joan Anderson (b.1943) is a Canadian musician, songwriter, and painter.

*I kid you not . . .*

We seemed to be making progress, getting airplay on the radio, and gradually getting our name more widely known. But then, as the story so often goes, the shit hit the fan.

*The 1979 Iranian Revolution triggered an oil crisis in the United States. While the newly installed Islamic Republic resumed oil exports, delivery was inconsistent and at a lower volume, thus forcing prices upward.*

*Saudi Arabia and its other OPEC partners<sup>268</sup> agreed to increase production to offset the decline. Widespread panic nonetheless resulted, driving oil prices skyward, and especially in the United States. (Yergin, 1993)*

Industries reliant upon the use of petroleum products found themselves vulnerable to financial difficulty, even failure. The American music industry, fundamentally predicated on the mass marketing of petroleum-based vinyl discs, was particularly affected. Numerous small and mid-sized record companies folded, some forced into bankruptcy, others being taken over by the emerging “Big 5” music industry cabal of EMI, Sony, BMG, PolyGram, WEA and MCA.<sup>269</sup>

Our Canadian record label GRT operated as a branch-plant subsidiary of its U.S. parent. Buoyed by the success of both PRiSM and label-mate Dan Hill,<sup>270</sup> earnings north of the border remained positive and stable. But GRT America, strained by a weak domestic roster, exorbitant increases in the cost of vinyl record production, and the looming spectre of economic recession, was forced into bankruptcy, dragging its relatively prosperous Canadian division down with it.

<sup>268</sup> Acronym for The Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries.

<sup>269</sup> Becoming the “Big 4” in 2004, with the amalgamation of Sony and BMG.

<sup>270</sup> Toronto-born singer-songwriter Daniel Grafton "Dan" Hill IV (b.1954), known for his 1977 hit “Sometimes When We Touch.”

The news reached us in Houston, Texas, where we were on tour with The Beach Boys. Our Holiday Inn, jammed in between two freeway on-ramps, was stinking hot, with snakes lurking in the grass by the pool, and pint-sized lizards hiding under the beds. All we could do was hang around and wait while our absurdly expensive Manhattan lawyer attempted to negotiate some sort of last-minute lifesaving contractual arrangement.

The phone rang in my room. It was manager Bruce Allen. “I’ve got good news,” he said, “and bad news.”

“Hit me,” I replied, steeling for the worst.

“GRT is bankrupt, and you’ve lost everything.”

“Everything?”

“Everything.”

“Three triple-platinum albums’ worth of royalties?”

“Yes.”

“All gone?”

“Gone . . .”

“So, what’s the good news?”

“You’re a free agent. And we’ll be selling to the highest bidder.”

Leslie, in retrospect, reacted pretty well. The offer on our dream house expired, and, to her credit — she took it like a pro.

PRiSM finished the tour, and hobbled home without a Canadian recording contract (our U.S. rights still being held by Ariola). Within months, however, management had hammered out a worldwide deal with Capitol Records (EMI's American subsidiary). It was literally a “million dollar” transaction, the first of its kind in Canada. (Norton, 2006)

The catch was (and there's always a catch) — we had to finance three LPs at around \$150,000 each plus buy ourselves out of the American contract with Ariola (at around \$500,000). Consequently, after expenses, our record-shattering deal yielded around \$25,000 per band member.

“Better than a poke in the eye,” I figured.

*There's no business like show business!*<sup>271</sup>

Capitol immediately re-released our final GRT album “Armageddon,”<sup>272</sup> which had already sold more than 300,000 domestic units. In fact, it eventually went on to sell an additional 200,000<sup>273</sup> copies, the royalties from which, though a fraction of the total in default, were nonetheless gratefully accepted.

Bruce Fairbairn, preeminent among PRiSM's three founding partners (with Vallance and myself), left the organization in 1981. We were in the middle of tracking the *Young and Restless* LP (our fourth). Tensions within the group were at an all-time high. The keyboard player, for instance, refused to perform at all if

<sup>271</sup> Song title. Written in 1954 by by Irving Berlin, for the musical *Annie Get Your Gun*, starring Ethel Merman.

<sup>272</sup> 1979 Juno Award winning Album of the Year, it was (if not mistaken) Canada's first quadruple-platinum selling LP.

<sup>273</sup> Double-platinum sales in Canada.

I was anywhere near the studio, insisting on being overdubbed separately in my scheduled absence. And, if that wasn't bad enough — band members with no prior track record (or skill) as songwriters (such as the drummer) were insisting on compositional participation. Consequently, the work became exceedingly tiresome.

Fairbairn and I took a break, and went for a walk outside.

“I'm moving on, Lin,” he said. “It's all yours now.”

Bruce had been the glue that kept the project together.

“Great,” I said. “Now the inmates can take over the asylum.”

The album was only partially completed. Consequently, as sole remaining original PRiSM partner, I was handed the task of producing the album's final mix, which took place over several weeks in Los Angeles. Next, I was invited to supervise mastering of our forthcoming 45rpm single<sup>274</sup> at Capitol records HQ in Toronto.

“Finally,” I thought, “a chance to be taken seriously in the business.”

Booked on the late-night redeye, I arrived at the airport early. With plenty of time to board, I decided to make a last minute phone call to Leslie, then a bulging eight months pregnant with second son Ian.

“I'm having contractions,” she said. “It's probably nothing, but I'm getting worried. Do you really have to go? Please don't.”

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<sup>274</sup> *Cover Girl*, with lyrics inspired by the true-life story of Vancouver-born “1980 Playboy Playmate of the Year” Dorothy Stratten (murdered by her jealous boyfriend).

“Wow!” I thought. “Talk about a rock and a hard place.”

I told Bruce Allen, who was booked on the same flight.

“You have a decision to make,” he said. “It’s either family . . . or career.”

“Really? One or the other? Black or white?”

“Absolutely! I’ve seen it before. Guys get married, settle down, have children, and the whole thing turns to shit.”

“Are you serious?”

“Very serious. Listen carefully. If you turn your back on this opportunity and go home to your whining pregnant wife — your precious rock-star career is over.”

“Really? Just like that?”

“Maybe not right away. It might take time . . . a year, eighteen months, maybe two. But before you know it — gone! This is a cutthroat business. If you want to make things happen, you have stay on top of things. You have to be obsessed!”

“Obsessed?”

“Priorities man! Priorities!”

Needless to say, I skipped the flight. My priorities were all wrong.



A friend of mine from the Vancouver suburb of New Westminister (where PRiSM singer Ron Tabak then lived) phoned me the next day at home.

“Patti and me were just sitting at a window table at the White Spot Restaurant on 6th Avenue,” he stammered, “and saw Ron being chased down the street by two tough-looking biker dudes with baseball bats!”

“Yikes!” I gulped, and hung up.

Inquiry revealed that Ron was being extorted for \$40,000, over an inflated debt owed to some mysterious “Doctor” in the British Properties.<sup>275</sup> PRiSM paid the bill, effectively calling off the dogs, but Ron’s relationship with the band (already strained) was damaged beyond repair, and he was let go, replaced by expat American singer Henry Small. We continued to record under contract with Capitol Records, mostly in Los Angeles, but the seeds of our eventual destruction had elsewhere already been sown.

*Punk music emerged as a viable commercial genre in the mid-late 1970s, conceived in aesthetic opposition to the perceived excesses of the mainstream, “corporate” rock music industry. In contrast to the sophisticated commerciality of established rock artists (such as PRiSM), alternative New York-based bands like the New York Dolls and the Ramones, and London-based outfits like the Sex Pistols and the Clash were instead offering crude, hard-edged, stripped-down instrumentation, and inflammatory, anti-establishment lyrics. Moreover, Punk culture tended to embody a DIY (do it yourself) ethic, with bands typically self-producing their own recordings and distributing them at their concerts or through informal social channels. (Keithley, 2004)*

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<sup>275</sup> An upscale residential enclave in West Vancouver.

Punk-rock c.1980 represented yet another sea-change in musical fashion, a paradigm shift if you will, just as normally occurs across succeeding generations. With the PRiSM brand clearly past its expiry date, and band membership in disarray, I resigned. It was a difficult decision, not taken lightly. Despite having had mountainous misgivings at the outset, I'd dedicated myself wholeheartedly to the project, and given it my best years. But in the end . . .

*There is no armour against fate.*<sup>276</sup>

James Shirley (1596-1666)

When I'd abandoned the Seeds of Time a decade earlier, being *sans orchestre* had presented a useful opportunity to pursue alternative modes of artistic expression. But back then I'd been single, and could more easily afford to fool around. This time, however, with a growing family to support (daughter Kelly having arrived in January, 1984), I needed to generate some income — immediately.

Ironically, the main impediment to me finding steady musical employment in Vancouver post-PRiSM — was PRiSM's very success. That is, having been absent on the road for several years (stoking the starmaker machine), my local street-level "cred" had dwindled in obverse proportion to my vaunted rock-star status. Having earned numerous gold and platinum LPs, with hit singles on the radio, and sold-out shows at the Pacific Coliseum — the Vancouver music scene no longer regarded me as one of the bunch.

A chance meeting at the Commodore Ballroom with veteran rock-star Randy Bachman<sup>277</sup> led to several months of productive distraction at his 24-track studio across the border in Washington State. We even did a few shows together, but

<sup>276</sup> Excerpted from *Contention of Ajax and Ulysses* (1659) sc. iii.

<sup>277</sup> Formerly of the Guess Who, and Bachman Turner Overdrive (BTO).

nothing came of it. I played other gigs here and there, either as a sideman in live-performance situations, or as a producer/session player on other people's recording projects. The work, however, was inconsistent, and finances were becoming strained. But a tardy royalty cheque finally arrived, buying us a little more time (and a brand new Volvo station-wagon to safely transport the kids).

I am prompted here to recall standing in the foyer of the Commodore Ballroom one evening, chatting with musician pal Jim Byrnes and a few other familiar folks, when this stranger sauntered over towards me, vying to get my attention.

“Hi Lindsay” he said

Now, I don't wish to sound conceited or pompous in any way, but seriously — in my heyday, in my home town — people used to come up and ask me for my autograph all the time, especially at concerts and public events. So please, forgive me for thinking this guy was just another fan.

“Hi,” I replied.

Wearing blue jeans, and a faded t-shirt underneath a rumpled jean jacket, with long stringy blond hair and a stubbly beard, he looked like any one of the five-hundred or so other hosers in attendance.

“You don't remember me, do you?” he said.

“No.” I replied, extending my hand. “Sorry.”

“It's me,” he said, smiling coyly. “Charlie . . . Charlie Simpson . . . from school.”

My jaw dropped. I just stood there. Flabbergasted . . .

This fellow had just walked over to me, like a regular person, with no apparent physical impediment other than perhaps appearing a bit drunk (unsteady gait, slightly slurred speech, etc). But we were all a bit lubricated that evening, and rather lurching about ourselves, so his slightly wobbly demeanor didn't seem all that much out of place.

“Charlie?” I blubbered. “Is that you?”

“Yes,” he chuckled. “It’s me.”

“It couldn’t be,” I replied, dumbfounded . “You’re walking upright, fully erect, and talking to me clearly. How on Earth?! It’s not possible! What happened?!”

“I’m a junkie,” he said. “Heroin. It’s the only thing that works.”

“Huh?”

“Well, the diazepam and the various other synthetic substitutes aren’t nearly as effective in relieving the spasticity as straight heroin. Sure, the street stuff is of inconsistent quality, and there’s increased risk of overdosing, but at least the opiates are organic — much healthier in the long run.”

I looked him straight in the eye, astonished at his articulation. Granted, his pupils were tiny black pins and he had that characteristic flat junkie facial expression. But the upside was — he was damn near normal, not completely perhaps, but a damn sight more normal than anyone at school ever thought he could be.

“Unbelievable!” I croaked, and gave him a great big hug.

“I’d like you to meet my girlfriend,” he said, introducing me to a pretty but tough looking young woman with conspicuous tattoos and a similarly opiated countenance.

“Nice to meet you,” she said, gently shaking my hand and leaning over to give Charlie an affectionate peck on the cheek. “We’re a good team,” she winked, not unsubtly taking credit for supplying the aforementioned contraband.

“Charlie has a girlfriend?!” I exclaimed, not wishing to seem rude, but with almost celebratory glee. “Congratulations!”

“Thanks,” he said. “It works for me.”<sup>278</sup>

Grateful to be blessed with three normal healthy children (Beau, Ian, and Kelly), Leslie decided that the family should be going to church, unilaterally deciding to join a burgeoning nonconformist<sup>279</sup> denomination. Though unbelieving myself, as a dutiful spouse, I agreed to accompany her in support. It was an interesting experience, and I did get to meet a lot of people whom I otherwise might never have encountered. Among them was a visiting brother from West Africa, who was attending graduate school at UBC. An amateur musician in his native country, he had asked church elders if there was anybody in the congregation with whom he might commiserate artistically, and was sent to chat with me.

He was blacker than black, and spoke with a clipped West African accent.

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<sup>278</sup> Note: Artie Simmons died in 2005, age 57, of natural causes.

<sup>279</sup> An expression dating to 18th century England, referring to any denomination other than Church of England or Roman Catholic.

“I’ve heard about this music called the blues,” he said. “Can you teach it to me?”

“Wow!” I thought. “This is weird.”

I gave it a go, but didn’t have much success, as he was completely unfamiliar with the African American canon and couldn’t “swing” to save his life.<sup>280</sup> Plus, being a devout Christian, he was clearly uncomfortable with blues music’s traditional employment of sexual innuendo and voodoo-inspired<sup>281</sup> hyperbole.

*I walked forty-seven miles of barbed wire,  
I got a cobra snake for a necktie  
A brand new house on the road side,  
And it’s a-made out of rattlesnake hide  
Got a brand new chimney put on top,  
And it’s a-made out of human skull  
Come on take a little walk with me baby,  
(Tell me) Who do you love? Who do you love?<sup>282</sup>*

Bo Diddley, 1956

The kids were growing up fast and, in order that they might enjoy a contiguous K-12 school experience (unlike their maladaptive male parental unit), I was determined that we remain living in the same comfortable neighbourhood that my previous rock-star status had afforded. Accordingly, they were encouraged to participate in organized team sports, like soccer, basketball, and baseball.

Leslie and I were active volunteer parents at every level, even serving on the executive of the West Point Grey Little League. As Head Grounds Keeper, it was

<sup>280</sup> A peculiar temporal phenomenon seen to result from the interaction between “odd” (3) and “even” (4) numbered beats, best represented in the blues as 6/8 “shuffle” time.

<sup>281</sup> Voodoo, from “vodun” - an Afro-Caribbean animistic religion.

<sup>282</sup> *Who Do You Love*, written by Bo Diddley (Elias McDaniel), released on Checker Records in 1956.

my job to deal with the Vancouver Parks Board, making sure we had enough diamonds for our rapidly expanding membership. I was also responsible for making sure they were well-groomed and safe to play on.

Essentially unemployed, with plenty of spare time on my hands, I became oddly preoccupied with manicuring the infield grass and the pitcher's mound, maintaining the outfield, and laying out perfectly straight, crisp white foul-lines. It was demanding physical work, but Zen-like and contemplative in its own way, its trance-inducing tedium mercifully ameliorating my post-PRiSM funk.

Then, dewdrop early one bright Sunday morning, while admiring the unspoiled geometry of my pre-game labours, in full-on *Field of Dreams*<sup>283</sup> clarity, I heard the disembodied voice of Willie Dixon echoing across time . . .

*Stay true to the blues son . . . and the blues will stay true to you.*

Leaning forward on my trusty rake, I was prompted to recall those weeks spent with him on the road decades earlier. I hadn't properly understood what he was talking about back then, being so much younger after all. But now, years later, it seemed to make more sense. His words of wisdom, masquerading as avuncular chitchat, felt like time-release knowledge capsules, belatedly streaming through my unsettled psyche.

Yes, I'd been unfaithful — *mea culpa* — and was clearly the worse for it. A veteran bluesician, and a decent one too, somewhere along the way I'd lost my cutting edge, and was in need of a good honing.

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<sup>283</sup> Alluding to the phrase "Build it . . . and they will come." from the 1989 Universal Pictures film *Field of Dreams*, based on the 1982 novel *Shoeless Joe*, written by Canadian author W.P. Kinsella.

*Definition of the term “hone” invokes the common English word “home,” as in to “hone in” on a particular idea or an aesthetic. An alternative meaning recalls the Old Norse “hun,” meaning “whetstone,” as in “to sharpen.”*

Sure, it’s easy to play the blues — badly. Optimal performance, however, is another story. So I resolved to “humble myself before the genre” as one might normally do in church. (Murray, 1976; in Hill, 2001) Former Kitsilano All-Star colleague Jack Lavin ran the Saturday afternoon jam session at the Yale Hotel, long recognized as Vancouver’s unofficial “Home of the Blues.” Getting in line with all the others weekend warriors, I gradually worked my way back into the scene. Jamming regularly at the Yale got my “chops” back up, and helped restore my sense of professional place.

*The most fundamental of all existential imperatives [is] affirmation, which is to say reaffirmation and continuity in the face of adversity. Reaffirmation is precisely the contingency upon which the very survival of man as human being, however normally unsatisfied or abnormally wretched, is predicated.*

Albert Murray (1976, 6)

With a view to stirring up some decent local gigs, I decided to organize an R&B quartet comprising two women (drums and sax) and two men (bass and lead guitar) called the Exceptions.<sup>284</sup> In addition to being capable instrumentalists, we each sang (both lead and *ensemble*) and our 4-way, male/female choral blend was extremely effective. We quickly found work in Vancouver’s cosmopolitan downtown core. But the suburbs were another story. One day I received a call from our booking agent.

“We have a problem out in Ladner,” he said. “The manager says some of his

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<sup>284</sup> Revellie Nixon - drums, Kirsten Nash - saxophone, William Taylor - bass, and myself on guitar.



customers have complained.”

“About what?”

“It’s not the music,” he said. “That’s fine. It’s just that . . . I don’t know exactly how to put this but . . . apparently someone there was uncomfortable with the idea of two men and two women performing on stage together.”

“I don’t understand. What exactly do you mean?”

“Well, according to them, it looks like two couples up there.”

“And how is that a problem?”

“W w . . . well,” he stammered, “William, your bass player . . . is black.”

“You’re kidding?!” I croaked, in utter disbelief at where the conversation appeared to be heading.

“It’s up to you,” replied the agent — clearly implying that in order for the band to get steady work outside the downtown core I’d have to hire an additional white guy . . . or find someone else to play bass.

“Isn’t that against the law?” I said, referring to Canada’s 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms (with which I was then only vaguely familiar).

“It’s not me!” protested the agent. “I know it’s wrong. But I can’t force people to hire you guys.”

“It’s 1984!” I bellowed into the phone, “And in Vancouver, British Columbia for Christ’s sake! Not Selma fucking Alabama! What are these these racist assholes thinking?!”

*In the United States, Americans are so blatant about racial prejudice. You can fight it, because they call you “nigger” and they segregate you out loud and clear. But the racism in Canada is so subtle, and so elusive you can’t really pin it down.*

Dorothy Nealy, 1979 (in Compton, 2001, 116)

The Exceptions gamely soldiered on. But with gigs in short supply, we drifted apart, eventually calling it quits altogether. Too bad. It was a shit hot little combo.

## Baldry, Byrnes & Billy

The mid-1980s found me puttering around with a number of ill-fated projects. Then, one day, out of the blue, I met Bill Cowsill (1948-2006). Brother Billy came from a once prominent American show-business family . . .

*Formed in the spring of 1965 by four brothers from Newport, Rhode Island (Bill, Bob, John, and Barry), the Cowsills were a family singing group specializing in what would later be defined as “bubblegum pop.” Inspired by the Everly Brothers and later the Beatles, their career began in Canton, Ohio, where father and manager Bill Sr. (Bud) Cowsill served as a recruiter for the U.S. Navy.*

*Signed by MGM records in 1967, the brothers were quickly joined by their siblings Susan and Paul and their mother Barbara to form “America’s First Family of Song.” The newly reconstituted group’s first hit on MGM was 1967’s “The Rain, the Park and Other Things,” with lead vocals by eldest brother Bill. Reaching #2 on Billboard Magazine’s Hot-100 chart, it sold more than three million copies domestically. 1968’s “Indian Lake” was similarly well received, as was their multi-million selling 1969 version of the title song from the musical Hair (also featuring Bill on lead vocals).*

*Between 1968 and 1973, the Cowsills averaged 200 performances per year. Their many network television appearances included The Ed Sullivan Show, The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, American Bandstand, The Mike Douglas Show, Playboy After Dark, Kraft Music Hall, and The Johnny Cash Show.*

*Particularly noted for their ability to sing multiple-part harmonies with remarkable accuracy (in the tradition of other famous sibling ensembles like the Mills Brothers, the Andrews Sisters, the Jackson 5, the Bee Gees, and the Beach Boys) they were one of most popular musical acts in America.*

*In 1968, Screen Gems approached the family to portray themselves in their*

*own TV sitcom. However, when told that the role of their mother was to be played by actress Shirley Jones - they balked, and the deal fell through. The show went on to be called The Partridge Family, and enjoyed a successful four-year run on ABC Television.*

*In late 1969, while performing in Las Vegas, Bill was fired from the group by his father (for smoking marijuana). By 1973, with Barbara, Paul, and Susan also having left the group, the “First-Family of Song” had disappeared from America’s pop-culture radar.*

Legend has it that, after leaving the Cowsill family band in 1970, Billy kicked around the Los Angeles music scene for a while, carousing with musician pals Warren Zevon<sup>285</sup> and Waddy Wachtel.<sup>286</sup> His wife consequently left, taking infant son Travis. Then, sadly unable to re-brand a career smeared by the dismissive descriptor “bubblegum,” and having effectively burnt all his personal and professional bridges, Bill fled to Austin, Texas, where he cashed in his remaining royalties and bought a bar.

“I drank it dry,” he later confessed.

From there he traveled straight north, all the way up to Canada’s Northwest Territories, where he found winter work riding shotgun on semi-trailer rigs traversing the ice-bridge between Yellowknife and Hay River. With the coming of Spring, and the closing (melting) of the road, he headed south to Edmonton, where he bumped into promoter/publicist Sarah Seigel, an old friend of mine.

“Tell me Sarah,” I once asked.<sup>287</sup> “Is it true that you met Billy when you were driving down the street in Edmonton, saw a pair of cowboy boots sticking out of a snow bank, pulled him free, and drove him to the hospital to treat his frostbitten

<sup>285</sup> Chicago-born rock singer, composer, and musician Warren William Zevon (1947-2003), noted for his sardonic song lyrics (eg: *Werewolves of London*, 1978).

<sup>286</sup> New York-born rock musician and record producer Robert "Waddy" Wachtel (b.1947)

<sup>287</sup> At Alberta-born singer-songwriter Betty (Chaba) McDamiel’s 2003 funeral.

fingers?”

“Not exactly,” she said. “Actually, I was waiting in line at my bank when this dark-eyed stranger wandered in and crashed right through a plate glass window, cutting himself to ribbons . . . and I drove him to the hospital to get all bandaged up.”

“Close enough.”

After briefly connecting with the Edmonton musical community (which then included eighteen year-old *ingenue* k.d. lang), Bill wound his way down to Vancouver. My good friend Mitzi Gibbs (sadly deceased) was well known for taking in strays. In fact, we first met back in the late 1960s, in Old Montréal, when she was nursing displaced American folk-singer Jesse Winchester.<sup>288</sup> One morning I dropped by her house in Kitsilano for some coffee and a chat, and saw a pair of cowboy boots conspicuously parked outside her bedroom door.

I’d heard the local buzz about this “Cowsill dude” (new in town, sings up a storm) and intuitively figured it must be him. A few stiff javas later and . . . Bill and I are strumming and singing around the kitchen table, all jacked-up on the music, and resolved to find a gig together somewhere.

Trimbles Restaurant,<sup>289</sup> a floundering West Side eatery operated by expat Irish American raconteur Bill Moran (won from previous owner Demetrios Mitsotakis in a backgammon game), was a perfect spot.

The act started out as just the two of us, with Billy singing lead and me providing vocal and guitar accompaniment. But Elmar Spanier soon fell in on upright bass,

<sup>288</sup> Louisiana-born musician and songwriter James Ridout Winchester (b.1944).

<sup>289</sup> On the Northeast corner of 10th Avenue and Trimble Street.

and together we played *mui copacetic*.<sup>290</sup>

At first it was just one night a week, then two, then three, and pretty soon there were lineups around the block to catch our strangely compelling little combo. One patron facetiously commented that, whereas our overall performance was technically superlative, the endings to some of our songs sounded like a “trainwreck,” and the name stuck.

The Trimbles gig lasted several months, generating a loyal and enthusiastic following, but things eventually got so rowdy that the neighbours complained to the authorities. So, with a view to keeping the peace, the Trainwreck’s residency was necessarily truncated.

No amount of hyperbole can do Billy Cowsill justice as a singer. Simply put, his was “the Voice of God.”

*Speaking in hyperbole is comely in nothing but love.*

Francis Bacon (Attr.)<sup>291</sup>

Don’t take my word for it. Internet tributes to the man’s memory abound.<sup>292</sup> For example, in Calgary, Alberta (where Bill died in 2006) a naive but well-meaning community group is seeking to preserve the rental property in which he lived.<sup>293</sup> And, an online petition promoting the Cowsill family as “forefront in the evolution of country rock,” seeks their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.<sup>294</sup>

<sup>290</sup> American Spanish for “extremely satisfactorily.”

<sup>291</sup> Francis Bacon (1561-1626), English lawyer and philosopher.

<sup>292</sup> [www.stellarshowcase.durham.on.ca/billycowsill.html](http://www.stellarshowcase.durham.on.ca/billycowsill.html)

<sup>293</sup> [www.calgaryheritage.org/phpbb/viewtopic.php?p=1703&sid=d6f2db41f6505f38509167e387aa7f63](http://www.calgaryheritage.org/phpbb/viewtopic.php?p=1703&sid=d6f2db41f6505f38509167e387aa7f63)

<sup>294</sup> [www.petitiononline.com/tchof05/petition.html](http://www.petitiononline.com/tchof05/petition.html)>. The Rock & Roll hall of Fame is located in Cleveland, Ohio.

*Cowsill made everyone he worked with a better singer, a better musician.*

Don Freeman (in Brock, 2006)

*Billy Cowsill brought a sense of wonder to everyone.*

Neil MacGonigall (Ibid.)

The Trainwreck performed together in and around Vancouver for the better part of a decade, guesting with Roy Orbison at Expo 86; with Gene Pitney at the Orpheum; backing up the Shirelles, Del Shannon, and Bo Diddley at the Commodore ballroom; and at countless restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, galleries, theatres, and private functions. Plus, we recorded extensively (the bulk of which remains unreleased).

We were a minimalist outfit: acoustic guitar, “doghouse” bass,<sup>295</sup> and electric guitar. And each of us sang. We weren’t really a blues band, more like a Skiffle or Rockabilly group — but with a shitload of Folk, R&B, Brit-pop, and old-school C&W thrown in.

Haunted by events and circumstances in his life, Bill had a deep dark side, and often would retreat into impenetrable blackness. But *daemons* notwithstanding, his level of performance remained remarkably consistent over time.

*He was the real deal . . . Guys like that don’t come on trees. He was one of a kind . . . He had this really unique take on music . . . It was a really bizarre thing . . . Very few people have it . . . You had to see him live to really get him . . . He just brought unbelievable emotions to it, incredible pitch, incredible tone. It was like he came from outer space or something. He was like perfect all the time.*

John Mackey, 2006<sup>296</sup> (in Brock 2006)

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<sup>295</sup> Acoustic upright double bass.

<sup>296</sup> Vancouver Sun music columnist and critic John Mackey.

I recall one day bemoaning my earlier commercial success with PRiSM, and how playing in a contrived, pop-rock group had served to compromise my status as an honest, working-class bluesician.

“Really?” countered Bill. “Try being a twenty year-old rocker in a bubblegum band with both your baby sister and your mother . . . Now that’s humiliation!”

Bill was a recovering alcoholic, and I never ever once saw him take a drink. His main problem was with pain medication — both prescribed and purloined. Plus he was bipolar — a volatile combination. As mutual pal Jim Byrnes once affectionately observed, Bill’s was “an exquisite blend of mental illness and substance abuse.”

Indeed, the man was truly extraordinary, and knowing him has left an indelible mark, both professionally and personally. Most of all, I found out that magic indeed does exist, and that God’s gift to mankind sometimes comes wrapped in deeply flawed packages.

*What is most original in a man’s nature is often that which is most desperate.*

Leonard Cohen (Beautiful Losers) 1966

Sons Ian and Beau were ten and twelve years-old, and daughter Kelly was coming up on eight. The West Point Grey Little League decided to hold a fund-raising dance at nearby Queen Mary Elementary School where all three kids were attending. Naturally, being in the music business, I was asked to arrange the evening’s entertainment. Provided with a decent budget, I rounded up a first-rate cast of local performers. Billy instantly volunteered, as did Jim Byrnes, who



brought along his dinner guest John Hammond.<sup>297</sup>

Byrnes is an interesting story. Originally from St. Louis, he emigrated to Canada following a stint with U.S. Forces in Vietnam, ending up on Vancouver Island, near the town of Nanaimo. On 26 February 1973, he was involved in automobile accident, losing both legs to above-the-knee amputation. (Mitchell, 2008)

Jim and I met at Oil Can Harry's Nightclub later that year, on Halloween, shortly following his initial convalescence. I was playing the upstairs room with the Seeds of Time, and he was doing a sit-down set of solo blues in the main lounge. We hit it off right away, united in our appreciation for blues music, and remain friends today, occasionally even performing together. His soulful authenticity, reflecting the unrelenting struggle to overcome the burden of his physical handicap, reminds me some of Brother Billy. His career success, triumphantly proclaiming the triumph of perseverance over adversity, is an enduring testament to the power of the living blues. (Ibid.)

Byrnes and Billy notwithstanding, the real star of the show that evening was legendary English bluesman "Long John" Baldry (1941-2005), who'd been living in Vancouver since the late 1980s. Blessed with a deep, rich voice, John stood a towering 6' 7" tall. Inspired as a teenager by African American bluesmaster Big Bill Broonzy,<sup>298</sup> and by John Lomax's<sup>299</sup> early field-trip recordings of the legendary Leadbelly,<sup>300</sup> he was one of the first British vocalists to sing blues music.

<sup>297</sup> New York-born John Paul Hammond (b.1942), son of legendary record producer John Hammond, Jr. (1910-1987), is a renowned blues singer and guitarist.

<sup>298</sup> Mississippi-born Big Bill Broonzy (1898-1958) was a prolific American folk-blues singer, songwriter and guitarist.

<sup>299</sup> Mississippi-born John Avery Lomax (1867-1948) was a noted American teacher, musicologist and folklorist.

<sup>300</sup> Louisiana-born Huddie William Ledbetter (1888-1949) was an iconic American folk-blues musician and songwriter, noted for his strong vocals and virtuosity on the 12-string guitar.

*John Baldry's seminal 1962 LP recording R&B at London's Marquee Club (with Alexis Korner's band Blues Incorporated) is widely regarded as the very first British blues recording. Eric Clapton has said that he was inspired to become a blues musician after seeing Baldry perform live. (Schumacher, 1998) Brit-Rock luminaries Mick Jagger, Jack Bruce, Charlie Watts, Brian Jones, Keith Richard, and Elton John were each at various times in his employ. And the Rolling Stones' first major London concert (at the Marquee) was in support of Baldry. (Stewart, 1970; Baldry, 2004; Oldham, 2003, 2005; Meyers, 2007)*

*In 1963, Baldry joined the Cyril Davies R&B All-Stars with guitarist Jimmy Page (later of Led Zeppelin), and Nicky Hopkins on piano. Re-styled as Long John Baldry and his Hoochie Coochie Men (following Davies' untimely death in 1964), the group's traditional R&B revue styled lineup featured a young Rod Stewart, who was recruited on the spot when Baldry heard him busking a Muddy Waters song at a London railway station. Next, with the addition of organist Brian Auger and singer Julie Driscoll, came Steam Packet. 1966 found Baldry fronting Bluesology, an R&B revue featuring young Reginald Dwight (aka: Elton John) on keyboards. (Ibid.)*

*His 1967 recording of "When the Heartaches Begin"<sup>301</sup> soared to #1 in the U.K. charts. A syrupy commercial-pop ballad in the mode of an Engleburt Humperdink or Matt Munro, it yielded a weekly BBC television variety program and broad nationwide popularity. But his loyal blues fans were less than impressed, and accused him of selling out.*

*"It was the hit that ruined my career" he bemoaned in conversation some years later. (Baldry, 2004) Emigrating to America in 1978, where "Heartaches" had received scant airplay, and where his reputation as a legitimate bluesman consequently remained unsullied by mainstream pop success, he lived at various times in New York, Los Angeles, and Toronto. Finally settling in Vancouver, British Columbia (his home for the next 25 years) he continued to record and tour extensively, in North America, the U.K., Scandinavia, and Europe. John William "Long John" Baldry died 21 June 2005, in Vancouver General Hospital, following a four-month battle with a severe chest infection (contracted while on tour in the U.K.). His cremated remains were later returned to London. (Meyers, 2007)*

<sup>301</sup> On the Pye label, written by Tony Macauley and John McLeod.

John and I met at one of his legendary birthday parties, held annually at his expansive Kitsilano penthouse. When it was discovered that we'd both lived in the same North London neighbourhood (near Canon's Park, in Whitchurch Lane) and had been assigned to Downer Grammar School (though roughly a decade apart), we were off and running — our well-lubricated vocal duet later that evening bringing down the house.

*Rule Britannia! Rule the fucking waves!  
Britons never ever shall be fucking slaves!*

We became firm friends, but only occasionally performed together (his regular guitar man Tony Robertson being more than capable). In addition to collaborating with Jim Byrnes and Billy Cowsill on the 1991 Little League dance, we produced a show for the Vancouver Sea Festival on the old Expo 86 site, a benefit for ex-Vancouver Mayor Sam Sullivan's disabled sailing foundation,<sup>302</sup> and a gala fundraiser for department store heiress Jacqui Cohen's Face the World Foundation beside Brit-pop legend Sir Tom Jones (a terrific bluesman in his own right).

John and I were dining out one evening at a local Brit-style pub (he loved his English roast beef and Yorkshire pudding), and started talking about dear old Willie Dixon, whom he'd known since the American Folk Blues Festival tours of Europe in the early 1960s.

“Did you go to his funeral?” I inquired. “Who was there? What was it like?”

“Goodness no!” he gasped, his face turning white. “I couldn't possibly have.”

“Why not?”

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<sup>302</sup> The Disabled Sailing Foundation of B.C. (DSB-BC) Founded by Sullivan in 1989. Headquartered at the Jericho Sailing Centre. <http://www.disabledsailingbc.org>

“Don’t you know?!” he exclaimed, as if in pain. “Haven’t you heard?!”

“Heard what?”

“Well,” he said, trying to compose himself, “I was visiting Willie at his home in California. His wife Marie had made tea and laid out some lovely pastries, and he and I were having a wonderful time chatting about the good old days in London. Then, it was time to go, and we were saying goodbye at his front door, and HE HAD A HEART ATTACK AND COLLAPSED DEAD IN MY ARMS!!”

“Yikes!” I said. “That’s terrible. But you shouldn’t beat yourself up. It wasn’t your fault.”

“I know,” he said. “I’m just getting over it now.”

## Unfinished Business

Eldest son Beau was in Grade 10, at Lord Byng Secondary. A talented sixteen year-old basketball player (6'6" and 215 lbs), he was also an outstanding student, confidently projecting that by graduation he'd have read the entire Western canon "from Homer to Kerouac."

And responsible too — he took a part-time job in Gr. 11, stuffing chickens in the delicatessen at the Safeway on Oak Street near the old-money enclave of Shaughnessy. But, less than a month later, Safeway staff throughout B.C went on strike, and Beau dutifully hit the picket line with his fellow workers. One Saturday afternoon, after completing his assigned shift, he came home, slammed the door loudly, and stormed straight up to his room (normally he'd have headed straight for the fridge).

"What's the matter kid?" I inquired at dinner.

"You wouldn't believe it," he said.

"Try me," I replied.

"Well . . . there we were . . . standing outside the store with our signs, and this middle-aged woman dripping with diamonds and wearing a fur coat drives by in a huge black Mercedes, rolls down her window and starts shaking her fist and shouting at us, like 'Get back to work you lazy good for nothings. Who do you think you are? You should be ashamed of yourselves.'"

“It’s not about me!” he continued, barely managing to control himself. “I’m just a kid from the neighbourhood, living at home with his parents. But there I am, standing next to Karen, a hardworking single-mother, with two kids to support, struggling to get by on shiftwork at the meat counter, and this rich bitch has the nerve to insult her — just because she has to drive a little farther for her fucking *foix gràs*! What the hell is wrong with these people?”

“Settle down Sonny,” I said. “You’re gonna hurt yourself.”

“Argh!” he grunted, digging into a plate of his mother’s lasagna.

“I suppose then,” I ventured, “that this wouldn’t be the best time to tell you that, on the strength of both your excellent grades and your basketball skills, Saint George’s School (a nearby exclusive academy) has offered you a scholarship.”

“Really?” he muttered, chugging down a gallon container of milk.

“Yup. What do you think?”

He thought for a second, then looked up. “Listen Dad. It’s very tempting. But, I don’t think so. They’re not our people. It would only bring pain.”

And interesting response, given his great-grandmother Laurel’s similar misgivings long ago.

Aah . . . from the mouths of babes.

In 1995, I finally decided to pursue the post-secondary education that I'd run away from as a teenager. Starting off at Langara College, I enrolled in an Asian Studies program offering courses in Pacific Rim languages, politics, cultural history and geography. Meanwhile, with the kids in school and Leslie attending university full-time (UBC), I still had to work full-time. The emotional, physical and financial strain was excruciating. Indeed, if it hadn't been for Nurse Wendy at Langara's drop-in medical clinic, who allowed me to take naps between classes in one of their dead-quiet, pitch-black examination rooms in the back — I wouldn't have made it.

Upon accumulating the required number of transfer credits, I moved on to 3rd year studies in the Faculty of Arts at UBC (3rd year), graduating in 1998 with a B.A. in Political Science. And it might have ended there, had I not already become addicted to education. Armed with a decent grade-point average, I managed to gain admittance to a M.A. program in Adult Education (also at UBC), where I came across a study examining occupational deviance from the point of view of "dance musicians" in Chicago c.1949-1955. (Becker, 1963) Impressed by its plain-speaking academic writing style, I was tempted to produce a comparable thesis from a contemporary "musicianing" perspective, but instead (at the last minute) decided to write about a crisis in UBC's Faculty of Education that I'd encountered in my role as student society (AMS) Ombudsperson.

Student teachers at UBC were complaining in surprisingly large numbers, especially regarding problems encountered during their 6-week, March-April practicums. The complainants (n15, mostly female) were fearful of reprisal from the Teacher Education Office (TEO), particularly regarding prospects for future employment. Prompted to look outside the Faculty of Education, they came to my office for advice and assistance. My job, essentially, was to smooth things over

and help everyone get along. Ongoing tensions nonetheless prevailed.

My thesis, a narrative exercise gently chiding Education for bureaucratic bullying and institutional hubris, received high praise. (Mitchell, 2002) Respectfully rendered, it nonetheless did touch a nerve, with some of the more defensive-minded senior faculty taking palpable offense (ironically corroborating its point).

*Don't shoot! I'm only the guitar player.*<sup>303</sup>

Meanwhile, as sole family breadwinner, I had to divide my concentration between home and school, ombudsing, and full-time musicianering. Decent in-town gigs were hard to come by, so I was occasionally obliged to go out “on the road” with a touring band, often missing classes for weeks at a time. My instructors were accommodating, however, and I managed to maintain decent grades. But something had to give, and Leslie’s and my 25-year marriage, already strained, began to unravel.

My father, Denis Mitchell, died in 2001. He’d always been a hard man to know, and we’d never been particularly close. Divorced from my mother for thirty-five years (and never remarried), he’d fallen out with my two younger sisters — so the job of holding his hand while he died fell to me. It was tough. Very sad. But hey, that’s life. I believe he did try to make things right at in the end, but he simply couldn’t find the words, successive strokes having wiped away his thoughts. I told him things were okay, and that, being a parent myself, I understood . . .

*A father is a man who fails every day.*

Michael Chabon (2009)<sup>304</sup>

<sup>303</sup> A reference to the 1973 LP *Don't Shoot Me: I'm Only the Piano Player* released on MCA Records by British singer/songwriter Elton John.

<sup>304</sup> Interviewed by Dave McGinn in the *Globe & Mail*, 11 October 2009.



He apologized for “perhaps being a little too hard” on me. And, as if to make amends, left a modest inheritance. Accordingly, I decided to take Leslie and the kids (then 23, 20 and 17) on a trip to London and Paris, hoping it might rejuvenate our spirits.

Baldry had left for the U.K. just a week earlier, where he’d been scheduled to perform a series of concerts with Brit-pop legends The Manfreds.<sup>305</sup> Contracted on the condition that he perform the song he most detested — “When the Heartaches Begin” — John wasn’t exactly relishing the thought.

“Ugh!” he grunted, just prior to departure. “I suppose I must, you know . . . give them what they want.”

The next day I got a frantic phone call from Baldry’s partner Oz. Apparently their Vancouver dry-cleaners had delivered only part of John’s stage wardrobe, and he was wondering (as I was headed that way) if I might consider hand delivering a suit bag containing the remainder. Happy to oblige, I called John upon arrival.

“How’s it going?” I said.

“All right, I suppose . . . if only those damned newspaper reporters would just leave me alone!”

“That’s great John! At least they’re talking about you.”

“It’s not me!” he snorted. “It’s that Sir Fat Bloody Reg.

“Who?”

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<sup>305</sup> The Manfred Mann Band *sans* Manfred, but featuring the Doo Wah Diddy man - Paul Jones..

“Elton bloody John!<sup>306</sup> That’s who! Ever since Reg got his precious knighthood, they’ve been hounding me, trying to get the lowdown, mostly about his drug use. Well I’ve never seen him take any sort of drug — ever! And they’re not getting any dirt from me!”

“Good on you old boy,” I said. “Fuck ‘em!”

Leaving Leslie and the kids to amuse themselves for the evening in Central London (they went dancing at the Ministry of Sound in Elephant and Castle), I took the train an hour south to the Civic Auditorium in suburban Guildford, Surrey.

“Make way for Mr. Baldry’s dry-cleaning!” I proclaimed. “All the way from Canada!”

A security guard showed me to the greenroom. “Oh good!” said John, “Fresh frocks!”

He poured some wine, and introduced me to his British colleagues.

“Meet my very good friend Lindsay Mitchell,” he said (bless his heart). “A brilliant blues guitarist from Vancouver!”

We chatted for half an hour or so, then — showtime! The Manfreds, featuring “Doo Wah Diddy” singer Paul Jones, went on first, offering up pop hits like “Pretty Flamingo” and Dylan’s “Mighty Quinn.” Chris Farlowe followed with a blowsy, overweight version of T-Bone Walker’s “Stormy Monday Blues.” Next was former *Zombies* lead-singer Colin Blunstone, who offered a selection of

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<sup>306</sup> Real name: Reginald Dwight.

British Invasion classics like “No One Told Me About Her” and “Tell Her No.”

John’s set, wisely reserved until after the intermission, was fabulous — the highlight of the show. Opening with the Memphis Slim staple “Everyday I Have the Blues,” he followed by Willie Dixon’s classic “I’m Ready,” and closed with his obligatory Brit-pop chestnut “When the Heartaches Begin.” The punters loved it! And I did too — “Heartaches” notwithstanding. Sadly, as I had to leave early to catch the late train back to London, I wasn’t able to tell him so.

The Mitchell clan had a grand time discovering England and France — the British Museum *et la Musée D’Orsay*; High Street Kensington *et la Rive Gauche*; the Tower of London *et la Tour Eiffel*; the Tate Modern *et le Centre Pompidou*, Buckingham Palace *et la Versailles*. We rocked them all! Sadly, however, the marriage was beyond repair, and Leslie and I split shortly after returning.

The breaking point doubtless came while I was completing my master’s thesis. Our home’s only active computer connection was in the living room (this was before wireless). And so, for the several months it took to compose, the furniture and floor were necessarily strewn with files, arranged haphazardly in a secret system known only to me, thus effectively precluding normal day-to-day domestic transnavigation. With deadlines looming, and pressure building, I grew commensurately more irascible.

“Enough!” she said. “I’m calling a lawyer, taking every penny you’ve got, and you’ll never see the kids again!”

“Gee honey,” I crooned, hoping to diffuse her resolve. “The kids are all grown up, and two of them have moved out.”

In truth? I saw it coming. And, in fairness, though never once unfaithful, the fault was mostly mine. She'd been musician's wife for over twenty-five years, and a mother too. She deserved to be herself. Nevertheless., my heart was broken, and it hurt like hell.

*Serves me right to suffer.*<sup>307</sup>

John Lee Hooker, 1964

Like many men in similar circumstances have done, I pulled myself together, lost a few pounds, and rented a bachelor apartment near the beach. Then, later that year, in the Fall of 2002, still reeling from the separation, I began my PhD program.

My advisor offered his assistance. "Do you want to think about maybe postponing your start date?"

"Bring it on," I said. "Geronimo!"

The Faculty of Education is essentially a teacher factory, especially the undergraduate division. The typical postgraduate Education student, however, is a currently employed female education professional seeking to upgrade her credentials with a view to enhancing future career opportunities

Me? I was just middle-aged male guitar player trying to get a few things straight.

*The goal of life is to make your heartbeat match the beat of the universe, to match your nature with Nature.*

Joseph Campbell<sup>308</sup> (attr.)

<sup>307</sup> Song lyric, written by Detroit-based, Texas bluesman John Lee Hooker (1917-2001) released on the 1964 VJ/Dynasty LP *In-Person*.

<sup>308</sup> American Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) best known for his work in comparative mythology and religion.

As an upstart PhD student, I was obliged to recruit potential committee members among Education's various departments and research centres. Let's just say there are two kinds of university professors — the ones with their heads completely up their ass, and the rest. One of the former was particular succinct in his antipathy towards my nascent "blues project"

"Stop wasting my time!" he sniffed dismissively, brusquely showing me the door.

Then there was the woman who accused me of "sabotaging" her doctoral seminar, simply because I declined to participate in an arts-and-crafts module aimed at female teachers of young children.

"I wouldn't wish to join a club that would have me as a member," I quipped, playfully citing Groucho.

Man! Was she pissed.

It was then suggested that I approach the department's several music education experts, with a view to perhaps finding some support there. But my instrumental skills were too primitive for their pedagogical purposes, their highly refined sensibilities being more attuned to classical music and jazz.

"You'll need extensive notation and theory training," said one, mistakenly assuming I wanted to be a music teacher. "Plus instruction in classroom management, course planning, and teaching methods."

"Wait a minute!" I said. "It's not about the music. It's about the musicians!"

The next guy up was an “art education” expert. Unlike his colleagues, he seemed rather intrigued.

“Yes, come to think of it,” he chuckled to himself, gazing wistfully out his office window, “Curriculum Studies sometimes does seem a bit like — muddy waters.”<sup>309</sup>

“Bingo!” I thought. “Maybe I am onto something here.”

Later on during that first term, while on the road performing in Calgary, I paid a visit to brother Billy Cowsill, who was in Foothills Hospital recovering from surgery related to the degenerative bone condition that would eventually (two years later) claim his life. Puffed up on cortisone and heavily sedated, with an intravenous drip, and oxygen tubes up his nose — he looked terrible.

“How’s it goin’ pal,” I said.

“Not so good man,” he mumbled back.

“You’ll be fine,” I ventured, clearly talking through my hat.

“I don’t think so,” he replied stoically. “They collapsed my left lung so they could operate on my spine from the front, but it won’t re-inflate. It’s over man . . . I’ll never sing again.”

Horried at the prospect, I reached over to touch his badly bruised hand, ravaged by repeated needle insertions.

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<sup>309</sup> An oblique reference to legendary Chicago bluesman Muddy Waters (1913-1983) born McKinley Morganfield, in Rolling Fork, Mississippi.

“How’s Phil?” he coughed (Phil being his pet-name for Leslie).<sup>310</sup>

“She’s okay,” I said, holding back a truckload of anger, resentment and rage.

“Give her my love. And a big kiss too.”

Suddenly, despite everything rotten that had happened between Leslie and me over the past year or so, and the fact that we hadn’t spoken civilly in months, somehow . . .

*I just had to let it go.*

John Lennon, 1978<sup>311</sup>

As soon as I got back to my hotel . . . I phoned her to pass along Billy’s love, and call a truce.

“Life’s too short,” I said.

“Yes,” she replied. “I know.”

Work on the PhD began in earnest. The problem was that, while there is naturally a surfeit of Curriculum Studies related literature devoted to “education,” there’s virtually nothing concerning “the blues.” Consequently, in order to amass the required number of degree-related credits, I was obliged to look outside the Faculty of Education for relevant courses.

A section offered in the Department of English entitled The Blues in African

<sup>310</sup> Leslie was “Phil” Everly to Billy’s “Don.”

<sup>311</sup> Excerpted lyric, from “Watching the Wheels.” Written in 1978 by John Lennon, and released posthumously after his assassination, it was the third and final single of Lennon and Yoko Ono’s 1980 Geffen LP *Double Fantasy*.

American Literature<sup>312</sup> caught my eye, and I signed on, figuring to maybe learn a thing or two. I must confess, however, that given my lengthy familiarity with the genre, and my experiences meeting and playing with Willie Dixon, T-Bone Walker, and Albert Collins *et al* — I went into it with a fairly big head.

I knew the history well enough (or so I thought) — slavery, Jim Crow, racial prejudice, oppression, lynching, the civil rights movement, etc. For instance, I still recall being eight years-old in Edmonton, and watching grainy black-and-white TV news coverage of desegregation at Little Rock High School in Arkansas. And I remember being fourteen years-old and seeing footage of Martin Luther King *et al* on their solemn march from Selma to Birmingham, being subjected to violence and humiliation at the hands of both the white citizenry and the thuggish police. And then there were the 1963 school bombings in Birmingham, Alabama; the Goodman, Chaney and Shwerner murders in 1964, the Los Angeles riots of 1965, and Chicago in 1968.

I thought I had the blues thing fairly well sussed.. How nice it is to be relieved of misconceptions.

Being Anglo Canadian, I'd never been exposed to African American literature. Blues lyrics perhaps, but nothing long-form, like an actual book. High school English instruction in B.C. during the early 1960s mostly involved the British canon — Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, etc. Sure, there was some CanLit on the menu, like Robert Service and Robertson Davies; and some mainstream (white) American fare, like Melville's Moby Dick, but no “soul food” whatsoever.

Our BluesLit class of around twenty comprised mainly English Department students, some foreign, with a fairly even male/female split. Except for the

<sup>312</sup>Eng. 555, a masters-level course.



professor (a non-musician), and a young black woman (a dancer) whose father was a veteran local jazzier (a bassist), none of them seemed to have any previous knowledge of blues music or blues culture.

The twice-a-week, two-hour seminar typically began with some recorded blues music — Muddy Waters, Howlin’ Wolf, Jimmy Reed, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, or Petie “the Devil’s Son-in-Law” Wheatstraw. Then, suitably acculturated, we’d convene around a conference table and discuss the week’s assigned readings.

Some of the titles on the list were familiar, but only vaguely. For example, I’d heard of Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison (1952), but hadn’t read it. In the hippie vernacular — my mind was blown! The “Battle Royale” scene (pp17-21) was particularly gruesome. More than I could take. Indeed, I had to put it down.

I was similarly moved (though perhaps not so dramatically) by Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940), The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison (1970), and Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston (1937). Each was devoured in quick succession. Others impressed as well, like The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain by Langston Hughes (1926), and Blues People by Leroi Jones. (Baraka, 1963)

Prompted to delve beyond the assigned materials, I procured a Norton Anthology of African American Literature (Gates & McKay, 1997), and discovered seminal works by Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. DuBois, and Booker T. Washington *et al.* I came to appreciate how the blues is more than simply music.

*The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged*

*grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically . . . they at once express both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer toughness of spirit. They fall short of tragedy only in that they provide no solution, offer no scapegoat but the self.*

Ralph Ellison (1964, 78)

I've lived in Vancouver for most of my life, But prior to reading Blueprint, a compendium of black British Columbian literature and orature edited by Wade Compton (2001), I knew nothing about historic Hogan's Alley — the racially distinct black community which had once flourished on the city's Downtown Eastside. Finally, after decades of occupational practice, I was able to place the city's indigenous R&B heritage in historical, cultural, and geographic context.

The information was satisfying enough, but not particularly useful. As Albert Murray (1976) points out, blues musicians “do not normally give much consideration to the sociological and psycho-spiritual implications of what is they're playing.” Indeed, “Their primary concerns are that of the artisan” (227).”

More about Dr. Murray . . .

*Born in Nokomis, Alabama, on 12 May 1916, he received a B.Sc. from Tuskegee Institute<sup>313</sup> in 1939. Joining the U.S. Air Force in 1943, he retired in 1962 with the rank of major. Earning his M.A. from New York, University in 1948, he taught literature and composition to civilians and soldiers both in the United States and abroad. (Tuskegee, 2003)*

*His first book, The Omni-Americans (1970), contains reviews, essays, and commentaries that engage and challenge the predominant frameworks within which matters of race and culture are discussed.*

<sup>313</sup> Founded in 1881 by Booker T. Washington as the Tuskegee Normal School for Colored Teachers.

*Critiquing what he called “the folklore of white supremacy and the fake lore of black pathology,” the book argues that all Americans are multi-colored and that social scientific attempts to explain black life in America are fundamentally mistaken. (Tuskegee, 2003) His next book, South to a Very Old Place (1971), “extends that argument with a series of memoirs, interviews, and reports that document the positive nurturing aspects of the African-American community in the South.” (Tuskegee, 2003)*

*In 1972, he was invited to give the Paul Anthony Brick Lectures on Ethics at the University of Missouri. These lectures were published as The Hero and the Blues (1973). In 1976 he wrote Stomping the Blues, “perhaps the best book ever published on jazz aesthetics,” and in 1985 collaborated with Court Basie on his autobiography, Good Morning Blues.*

*An 1991 essay on the paintings of Romare Bearden: Finding the Rhythm “extends Murray’s concepts of improvisation, rhythm, and synthesis even to the realm of the visual arts.” (Ibid.)*

Many contemporary scholars (mostly white) view the blues as a privileged discursive site, asserting that African Americans, through the experiences of their forebears, hold a kind of proprietary interest in the blues, that only blacks have a legitimate right to play and sing the blues, and that non-black blues represent an inferior (if not fraudulently inauthentic) copy of the real thing. (Borgo, 1998; Hill, 2001; Garon, 1996; 2005)

It was, therefore, reassuring to learn that Murray rejects as simplistic the claim that non-blacks are intrinsically unqualified to play the blues, maintaining that one indeed can — if one is a good enough musician and respects the medium as he would any other art form; if one develops the same familiarity with its idiomatic nuances, and the same love and humility before it as the good Negro musician does; and if one is genuinely dedicated to the idiom and “not merely ambivalent about it.” (Hill, 2004, 10)

*The blues are not only plural, but so numerous as to be numberless.*

Albert Murray (1976, 6)

I had previously thought it virtually impossible that one could learn anything deep or profound about the blues at university. But the literature encountered in ENG 555 turned that mistaken notion on its head.

*What it all represents is an attitude towards the nature of human experience (and the alternatives of human adjustment) that is both elemental and comprehensive. It is a statement about confronting the complexities inherent in the human situation and about improvising or experimenting, or riffing, or otherwise playing with (or even gambling with) such possibilities as are also inherent in the obstacles, the disjunctures, and the jeopardy. It is also a statement about perseverance and about resilience and about the maintenance of equilibrium despite precarious circumstances and about achieving elegance in the very process of coping with the rudiments of subsistence. (Murray, 1976, 251)*

I subsequently discovered that, along with New Orleans-based trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, Albert Murray is co-founder of the New York-based institution known as Jazz at Lincoln Center. Curious regarding his present situation, I emailed their Education Department, inquiring as to whether the old man (b. 1916) was still alive, and if he might perhaps be willing to entertain some correspondence. The reply, from an amiable research assistant named Patti, was immediate.

“Dr. Murray is indeed alive and well,” she confirmed, “And would be delighted to hear from you.

Cross-referencing his address with the NYC online telephone directory (411.com), I managed to retrieve the man’s home phone number, but never called. It

would've been rude. Besides, what would I have said?

“Hi Dr. Murray. You don't know me, but I'm a huge fan?”

## Bringing It All Back Home

In January 2005, Long John Baldry became seriously ill with pneumonia and was admitted to intensive care at Vancouver General Hospital. A lifelong smoker with a love of rich food and drink, and an acute aversion to physical exercise — the prognosis wasn't good. I visited him in hospital several times, both with pal Jim Byrnes, and with Andrew Loog Oldham, the Rolling Stones' former manager and record producer (an intermittent Vancouver resident). There I met John's younger sister Margaret, who, fearing the worst, had quickly come over from England.

John's condition steadily worsened (despite B.C.'s first-rate socialized medical care) and his passing seemed imminent. Sir Paul McCartney telegrammed best wishes, as did Sir Fat Reg, and Rod Stewart left a lovely phone message. Shirley Watts (wife of Stones drummer Charlie) sent a beautiful note, which Oldham read aloud. Nevertheless, severely weakened from the ordeal, John died. His memorial service, held at the Arts Club Theatre on Granville Island, was a magnificent SRO affair.

Finally, after much bickering back and forth between John's friends in Canada and his family in the U.K., it was decided that his ashes would be returned to England. As I was to be performing in Europe later in the Fall (with piano-man Doc Fingers *et al*) . . . I was asked to transport his ashes.

“Good evening sir,” said the senior security officer at Vancouver International Airport (YVR). “Do you have any flammable liquids, lighters, matches, or sharp objects like knives, nail scissors, or anything of that sort.”

“No,” I replied, carefully loading my guitar onto the conveyor belt, “but I do

have some cremated human remains to declare.”

He stiffened, doubtless deciding whether to take me seriously, or reach for his Taser.

“Not joking,” I said, gingerly handing him a black vinyl carry-on bag. “There’s an urn inside containing the ashes of a deceased person.”

“Your boarding pass please sir.”

“I’m a professional musician,” I explained, “traveling to Oslo via London with a 2-hr layover at Heathrow. The plan is to exit the international area and deliver my friend’s ashes to grieving relatives waiting in the main concourse, then go back through security and reboard.

He nodded in tentative accord, mentally walking himself through the proposed procedure, carefully calculating the likelihood of deceit.

“The papers are all in order,” I said, presenting him with the death certificate, the cremation certificate, and a formal document signed by B.C. Premier Gordon Campbell acknowledging “Long John John Baldry’s unique contribution to Canadian arts and culture.”

With a sigh of relief, doubtless thankful for having been relieved of any major responsibility, he crossed himself in Filipino Catholic fashion. Then, holding the bag at arms length, and gently admonishing his colleagues to clear a path for our improvised funeral procession, he reverently slow-marched us both over to the examination table. Finally, with everything double-checked and fully signed-off,

and with his crew lined up and standing respectfully at attention, he saluted farewell.

“Goodbye sir,” he said. “And may you and your esteemed friend have a safe trip.”

Boarding British Airways flight 0084 to London, I requested to speak with the senior steward.

“Excuse me,” I said. “Are you familiar with the English singer Long John Baldry?”

“Certainly,” he replied. “My Mum loved that ‘Heartaches’ song he had back in the 70s. Didn’t he just recently pass away?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact he did,” I said, grinning coyly, “and he’s right here in this bag.”

“How then may we assist you sir?”

“Well, my ticket is in economy, but Mr. Baldry is rather accustomed to flying first-class . Do you think you might be able to accommodate him up there in one of those overhead luggage compartments?”

“I’m sorry sir, but we can’t separate you from your carry-on luggage.”

I wasn’t giving up that easily.

“Pardon me!” I said, channeling Baldry’s booming theatrical baritone. “This is



British Airways . . . is it not?!!”

“Yes . . . of course it is sir,” said the steward, looking puzzled.

“Well then!” I replied, strategically focussing my delivery. “Would you be the one to deny a true son of Albion<sup>314</sup> his rightful chariot home?!”

“Very well sir,” he conceded. “I’ll talk to the Captain.”

Landing at LHR, instead of waiting around in the secure area for the connecting flight to Norway, I exited through customs and immigration to the main terminal, where Margaret Baldry was waiting to receive her brother’s remains.

“You’ll be happy to know that John flew home premier class,” I said.

“Thank you so much!” she sniffed, tearfully cradling her precious cargo.

“So, where’s he off to now? What’s the plan?”

“Well, we’re going to place his urn in the family reliquary at St. Lawrence Church, in Whitchurch Lane, near Canon’s Park in North London.”

“I know that church. And the park too. In fact, I used go by there on the bus to school everyday when I was a kid, and cut through the bushes at the back of the cemetery to get to my friend Adrian’s house on the other side.”

“You know St. Lawrence?” she said, her eyes brightening. “Really? ”

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<sup>314</sup> The ancient name for the island of Great Britain, from the Latin *albus* (meaning “white?”), believed to refer to the White Cliffs of Dover.

“Certainly. It was restored from the ruins of a medieval monastery around 1700 by James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos, patron of George Frederick Handel, who previewed many of his great works there.”

“That’s right!”

“Yeah! It all seemed so incredibly ancient back then. There was this tree, a thousand years-old, all propped-up with staves and held together with ropes and chains. I tried to climb it once, but the nuns chased me away.”

Sister Margaret began to shudder.

“Is everything okay?” I said. “Did I say something wrong?”

“Oh no,” she replied, collapsing into tears, “It’s nothing like that. It’s just that (baawl) . . . when John was a young boy (baawl) . . . he used to sit and play his guitar under that very same (baawl) treeeeee . . .”

Mission accomplished (*mortuus somes revertio*),<sup>315</sup> but it was time to go, so I kissed Margaret on the cheek goodbye, wound my way back through airport security *sans bagages*, and boarded the flight to Norway.

“How’d it go?” inquired seat-mate Doctor Fingers, enjoying a glass of red wine with his in-flight meal.

“Well,” I mused, toasting our adventure with a flute of fine champagne. “There’s one thing you can say about the blues — they travel well.”

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<sup>315</sup> Latin for “dead body returned.”

Interpretation  
&  
Analysis

*Analysis is one of those impossible professions in which one can be quite sure of unsatisfying results.*<sup>316</sup>

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939)

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<sup>316</sup> From *Analysis: Terminable and Interminable* (1937)

It is not generally the business of interpretive research to render firm conclusions. Inquiry of such sort rather relishes the idea of “indeterminacy,” with readers instead being encouraged “to create additional material by further imaginative act.” (Maitre, 1983, 38)

Accordingly, imagine a blues or jazz band in live performance, with a full *ensemble* of musical instruments at play — the solo lead vocalist, the double bass, a three-piece horn section, a trio of back-up singers, the four-string bass, six-string guitar, six-piece drum kit,<sup>317</sup> and the 88-key piano — and each voice contributing to a meaning-filled interpretation of the piece.

Analysis of the preceding *bildungsroman* similarly invites the participation of certain numerative heuristic instruments, each exploring a different avenue of human experience.

*Instinct perfected involves constructing and using conventional instruments; intelligence perfected involves making and using unconventional instruments.*

Henri-Louis Bergson,<sup>318</sup> 1907

The dialectic, for example, speaks well on issues surrounding individual and collective identity. Three-ness highlights formal, informal and non-formal education — plus instrumental, transformative, and communicative learning. Four kinds of knowledge are correspondingly engaged, as are six perspectives on teaching, eight multiple intelligences, and an eight-stage model of human existence.

<sup>317</sup> Bass drum, snare drum, tom-tom, plus hi-hat, ride, and crash cymbals.

<sup>318</sup> Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941) French philosopher and colleague of American pragmatist William James. Excerpted from *Creative Evolution* (1907)

## The dialectic

The dialectic has long been conceived in terms of power relations and class. (Marx, 1964) I'd long been aware of class as an intellectual concept, but had never given it much serious consideration prior to attending UBC in 1998. Indeed, I vividly recall standing in front of the Main Library on the first day of Term One, and being oddly overwhelmed by a profound affinity with my long dead working-class grandparents and great-grandparents.

Gazing around the campus at the various faculty buildings (Chemistry, Law, Anthropology, Psychology, Medicine, Business Management, Engineering, Physics, Geography, Mathematics, etc), I realized that, despite having grown up in relatively egalitarian post-WWII Canada, I was nonetheless still very much a product of highly stratified 19th century Victorian England — a world where people generally knew their place, and didn't presume otherwise.

*The ruling ideas of each age have been the ideas of its ruling class.*

Karl Marx, 1848<sup>319</sup>

In a twinkling, I understood how we do not simply exist in the present, but as an ontological extension of our forebears. Constructivist learning theory sees character development involving the erection of new personality frameworks upon pre-existent familial and cultural foundations. Individual identity and social class are thus inextricably linked.

My parents (b.1921) never thought about going to university. It simply wasn't on their radar. Like with most of their undistinguished ilk, schooling stopped in

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<sup>319</sup> In *The Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1848, sec.2)

Gr.10. But WWII changed everything. Having pulled together as a nation to gain victory over the Axis, Britain in the early 1950s began to reconsider long-held blind allegiances to old-fashioned ideas about education and social station. Young parents began to entertain tentative notions of upward mobility, if not for themselves, at least for their baby-boomer children. Accordingly, it was hoped that I might go on to a post-secondary institution and perhaps one day attain respectable middle-class status as a “professional” of some sort.

It is said that the English aren't happy unless they have someone to look down upon. Indeed, even as a young child, I was keenly aware of how *otherness* was manifest in a person's mode of speech. My father's people were from Dover, and spoke with a marked Kentish twang. And my mother's inner-city London family had strong Cockney accents. But I was encouraged to speak in more measured tones, eschewing the untoward inflections of my less cultivated relations.

*Those whose modes of speech were formed between the years 1945-1968 should pronounce in the Churchillian manner, thus: “Thowsands and thowsands of Bory Scowts bownding arownd in browwn trowsers,” forming the ‘ow’ sound by making a tight circle with the lips and keeping the tongue stiff, but not tremulous.*

*Younger pronouncers, educated between 1968 and 1983, may prefer the equally prestigious but somehow brisker: “Thighsands and thighsands of Buy Skites binding arinde in brine tryzers.” These sounds are accomplished with a baring of clenched teeth, stretched but immobile lips, and a discreet wagging of the tongue behind the ivory fence . . .*

*There are few circumstances in which regional or working-class pronunciations are permissible, though it is admittedly useful to have a reasonable stock of them in [one's] repertoire . . . like on the telephone when financial restraint has made it necessary to dispense with the butler or other intermediary. (Chance, 1984, 478)*

Britain's class system in the 1950s, though increasingly challenged, nonetheless remained deeply entrenched. Emigration to the dominions<sup>320</sup> offered a viable option for those seeking to transcend social and economic limitations. In addition to highlighting the distinction between First-Class passengers and regular, rank-and-file humanity — our initial trans-Atlantic crossing afforded the opportunity for me to meet “coloured” people for the very first time. Thus, I discovered that human beings — regardless of race, ethnicity, and cultural background — are essentially the same inside.

*Your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as Gods, knowing good and evil.*

Genesis, 3:5

Upon arrival in Canada at age eight, the importance of integrating socially became painfully apparent. But my efforts were quickly stymied. Prime culpability here is awarded to Principal Henderson, whose arbitrary decision to accelerate me ahead two grades served to distort certain aspects of my normal childhood development. The paradoxical possibility for well-intentioned pedagogy to instead effect negative consequences is thus exposed.

Analysis also confirms that, while women were reasonably well represented among elementary teachers in Western Canada during the 1950s, school administration remained overwhelmingly male.

*Mature and energetic males stood in contrast to typically young and malleable female teachers; the latter, it was implied if not overtly stated, accepted low wages and therefore undermined [the] professional quest. If the former left teaching for greener pastures, the latter typically departed to marry. (Danylewycz & Prentice, 1986, 135)*

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<sup>320</sup> Notably Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.



Principal Henderson's pedagogical authority thus generally held sway in relations with females under his institutional jurisdiction c.1957. Moreover, his elevated status as a "professional" educator prompted my instructionally challenged working-class parents to defer criticism — particularly my mother who, in stereotypical 1950s family fashion, was responsible for dealing with school-related issues.

Returning to England at age eleven served to illuminate the contrast between old and new-world values — particularly regarding education. The stringent dress-code, the Eleven-Plus Exam, the Head Master's quasi-liturgical performance, and the routine employment of corporal punishment by prefects — each demonstrated Britain's hidebound attitude compared to Canada's "more modern and up-to-date approach." (Leacock, 1984, 230)

Returning to Canada again a year later at age twelve presented a different set of contradictions, both at school and in the greater world — racial prejudice for instance. England in the 1950s was comparatively homogeneous, but early 1960s Vancouver, dotted with First-Nations reserves, and with its highly visible Asian community, was *another* story altogether. Preceded by a lengthy local history of race-based discrimination — the anti-Asians riots of 1907, the Komagata Maru incident in 1914, the Asian Exclusion Act of 1923, widespread Ku Klux Klan activity in the 1920s and 30s, the internment of Japanese-Canadians during WWII, restrictive covenants regarding the sale of property to non-whites and Jews,<sup>321</sup> and the ongoing systematic marginalization of First Nations people — division along ethnic and cultural lines, though muted to some degree, was nonetheless clearly apparent.<sup>322</sup> (Davis, 1998; Barman, 1996; 1991)

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<sup>321</sup> Notably in Shaughnessy and the British Properties.

<sup>322</sup> Particularly regarding access to jobs and housing.

It's difficult, if not impossible, to fully apprehend social prejudice from a dominant-group perspective. Nevertheless, having as an adolescent been obliged to endure a modicum of age-related isolation, I was perhaps a bit less insensitive to how *others* might feel about arbitrarily imposed limits on their participation within mainstream society.

My K-12 educational experience, on balance, was negative. Radical acceleration in the early elementary grades only served to generate a deep-seated antipathy towards schooling which festered and intensified over time. Graduation meant nothing, like the proverbial “bridge to nowhere” — a non-event. Consequently, rather than going straight on to university as had been expected (given my more than adequate grades), I instead chose to look for work. But, being too young and inept to be taken seriously as a candidate for meaningful employment, my career options were severely circumscribed.

Looking back, had Principal Henderson in 1957 been aware of Erikson's (1959; 1982) eight-stage theory of human development. Had he known, for instance, that skipping me ahead would hamper my ability to master important tasks related to successful passage through each subsequent level of maturity. Had he better understood the known/unknown dichotomy . . .

*There are known knowns. These are things we know that we know. There are known unknowns. That is to say, there are things that we know we don't know. But there are also unknown unknowns. These are things we do not know we don't know.*

Donald Rumsfeld, 2002<sup>323</sup>

Nevertheless, I was summarily advanced, and, by age eighteen had become a full-fledged working musician. Conventional employment is characterized by

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<sup>323</sup> Quote from a Pentagon press briefing given by former US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld 12 Feb.2002.

routinized activity and job security. The music business is not. Work is instead sporadic and insecure. (Becker, 1951; 1963; 1982)

Numerous other contradictions were encountered as a working musician, many of which, in their own way, were instructive — such as:

- (a) Individual/collective: involving relationships between oneself as an individual musician, and as a participant in group undertakings, such as performing *ensemble*, living communally, going on tour, recording a CD, or entering into contractual arrangements, etc.
- (b) Us/them: referring to tensions between one's own performing unit and other players in the music industry (competing acts, record companies, promoters, retailers, media, etc).
- (c) Success/failure: surviving the vicissitudes of show business.
- (d) Work/play: the paradox of getting paid to do something innately enjoyable and fulfilling.
- (e) Traditional/contemporary: the challenge of remaining up-to-date and relevant while staying true to one's musical roots.
- (e) Sacred/profane: being provocative and irreverent while maintaining dignity and professional credibility.
- (f) Art/science: striking a balance between aesthetics and technology
- (g) Art/commerce: integrity vs. prosperity.
- (h) Young/old: involving inter-generational dynamics.
- (i) Male/female: both with respect to professional relations between men and women in the music industry (musicians, singers, agents, managers, publicists, technicians, etc), and romantic partnerships.

- (j) Gay/straight: interaction with homosexual men and women.
- (k) Performer/audience: interaction between musician/singers and spectators (professional and social) .

While immersed in two-ness, the Hegelian dialectic concurrently also embodies a triadic component — a thesis naturally giving rise to its equal and opposite antithesis, with tension between the two being resolved through a process of synthesis.

Respecting the performer/audience contradiction above — “call and response” is a form of spontaneous interaction typical of African American blues-based music whereby verbal and non-verbal performative statements are reciprocated in kind by *other* voices, typically fellow performers (eg: back-up singers) and/or audience members.

The ontological barrier between object and observer is thus transcended through mutual participation (an invitation extended to readers of this dissertation), and a peculiar third existential element is conjured forth and “entertained” (from the Latin *tenere*, meaning “to hold,” and *inter*, meaning “between” or “among”).

Accordingly, in figurative correspondence with “call and response” — footnotes and italicized quotes are liberally employed throughout this exercise.

*That's entertainment . . .*<sup>324</sup>

Oscar Levant, 1953

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<sup>324</sup> Popular song title. Music by Arthur Schwartz. Lyrics by Howard Deitz. From the 1953 MGM musical film *The Band Wagon*.

### Three-ness

As previewed earlier (p21), this study acknowledges three distinct modes of education. (LaBelle, 1982) Formal education tends to privilege hierarchically-structured, organized classroom instruction, which in turn typically foregrounds conventional transmissive teaching methods.

Informal education is not altogether different, referring to formally organized instruction which takes place in institutional settings outside the school or classroom, such as art galleries, museums, rehearsal halls, and corporate offices, etc. The informal designation also refers to semi-structured workplace situations, such as traditional apprenticeship and ongoing corporate training.

Non-formal education, however, take place entirely outside the classroom, and focusses on the instructional properties of day-to-day social and occupational interaction. As such, it is by nature incidental, spontaneous, and often even unintended.

With scheduled its lectures, text books, exams, and ritualized advancement protocols, university is a highly formalized affair. Blues practice, though similarly rich in tradition, ritual, and regalia — is quite the opposite. Each, however, is educative in its own way.

*All individuals are engaged in learning experiences at all times.*<sup>325</sup>

Thomas J. La Belle (1982, abstract)

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<sup>325</sup> Emphasis mine.

## Learning

This study also entertains three kinds of learning. Instrumental learning involves the acquisition of basic cognitive and psychomotor proficiencies such as the fundamentals of reading, writing, vocabulary, and arithmetic, etc. The preceding story describes how the English primary school system in the mid-1950s promoted early and rapid development in those key areas. (pp33-34)

Learning how to drive a car is similarly instrumental. The legal driving age in B.C. is sixteen. Having been skipped forward two grades, and thus precluded from developing concurrently with my graduating cohort, I was more inclined to postpone getting my driver's license, holding off until age twenty-four.

Instrumental learning in the blues primarily involves acquiring technical facility on one's chosen musical instrument and/or as a singer. Full proficiency typically requires decades of purposeful career experience. As such, it is viewed as function of maturity.

The dialectic distinguishes two modes of instrumental learning in the blues. One is individual, involving countless hours of lonely repetition, playing the same riffs over and over again, for days, months, even years — literally training the fingers to obey the brain's command. Guitar players call this “shedding” — as in “going to the woodshed.” It's private work, but necessary (and time consuming too), thus best invested in while young.

The other way is collective. Wynton Marsalis (2008) describes occupational jazz and blues music practice, with individual performers improvising together in common cause, as “democracy in action.” Indeed, for most working musicians,

the goal is harmony (notwithstanding the occasional utility of dissonance). Tonal harmony in the blues (as in all music) involves the maintenance of consonant relations between a multiplicity of melodic voices. Rhythmic harmony in the blues resides within the “groove,” sustained in live performance through equal parts metric precision, constancy, and playfulness. As such, it is everyone’s duty to maintain, whether in the rhythm section, the horn section, the solo section, or the vocal section. Rhythm rules!

*Time is tight.*<sup>326</sup>

Booker T. Jones, 1969

I am an unstudied musician; essentially self-taught. As such, a fair portion of my rhythmic education was derived through my early acquaintance with the game of basketball. Much has been written about the relationship between basketball and American blues and jazz, with observers positing a variety of entertaining similarities. (O’Meally, 1998) Each, for instance, is felt to embody elements of tempo, pace, counterpoint, rhythm, and flow. Like musicians, some basketball players, are gifted soloists. Others seem to work better in tandem, like in duos or trios, or all together — as in a full-court press or zone-defense. Counterpoint is another shared feature, is “give and go” and “cut and fill. A primary parallel, however, involves mutual regard for extemporization (both individually and collectively) upon a previously established game-plan or musical theme.

*Improvisation is too important to be left to chance.*

Paul Simon<sup>327</sup> (attr.)

Communicative learning involves how individuals express their feelings, needs, and desires. Canale and Swain (1980, 1-47) define communicative competence

<sup>326</sup> Instrumental title, written and recorded by Booker T. and the MGs on the Stax/Atlantic label (1969).

<sup>327</sup> New Jersey-born singer-songwriter Paul Frederic Simon (b.1941) is a member of noted American duo Simon and Garfunkel.

in terms of three essential components:

1. Grammatical competence: words and rules
2. Socio-linguistic competence: verbal appropriateness
3. Strategic competence: the purposeful deployment of appropriate grammar.

Elementary communicative skills are typically acquired in childhood and adolescence, through schooling and everyday socialization, but optimum facility (as with instrumental learning) is similarly seen as a function of maturity. As a working musician, I learned to communicate “instrumentally” by watching, listening, and emulating others with more experience in the field. Along the way I came to better appreciate the revelatory potential of creative self-expression.

*Music can name the unnamable and communicate the unknowable.*

Leonard Bernstein (attr.)

An intriguing dialectic emerges here between competencies deemed helpful as musician, songwriter, and recording artist, and the kinds of skills utilized in higher education — particularly respecting written communication. At college and university, for example, one is routinely required to submit lengthy essays and major papers involving complex reasoning couched in scholarly, discipline-specific language. Popular songwriting, on the other hand, is a relatively concise undertaking, with grammar, style and syntax being uncomplicated and colloquial in nature.

Dissertations such as this one, involving hundreds of pages and many thousands of words, are typically evaluated by committees of fewer than ten members, with a potential readership limited to a relatively small number of people in a specific



academic field. The popular song, however, normally comprises but a few lines of verse, a chorus and perhaps a bridge. And, with record sales potentially in the millions, its message is designed for mass consumption.

Transformative learning is seen to take place when, through critical reflection, long held predispositions, beliefs and judgments are altered, refined or otherwise elaborated upon to effect positive changes in attitude or perspective. (Mezirow, 1991; 1997) As such, it tends to see things in terms of epistemic aptitude, and strives to be more discerning about the stuff we normally hold true — like faulty arguments, hasty generalizations, assertions lacking evidence and claims based on unreliable authority. (Grabov, 1996)

Mezirow (1991) associates transformation with personal trauma, seeing it resulting from some sort of “disorienting dilemma,” such as is typically triggered by a “life crisis” or “major life transition.” We are once again reminded, however, that not all learning is necessarily positive and good, and that negative transformations can (and often do) take place. (Merriam *et al*, 1996)

*You live you learn*

*You love you learn*

*You cry you learn*

*You lose you learn*

*You bleed you learn*

*You scream you learn*

Alanis Morissette, 1996<sup>328</sup>

The foregoing narrative is rife with such events. Being arbitrarily skipped ahead in elementary school, for instance, helped transform a relatively normal eight

<sup>328</sup> Excerpted song lyric, from *You Learn*, written by Alanis Morissette and Glen Ballard, released in 1996, on the Maverick Records CD *Jagged Little Pill*.

year-old kid into someone with a lifelong antipathy towards authority figures and the institutions they represent. And there's nothing like decades of deviant occupational practice to further distend an already oblique outlook on life.

Susan Merriam (1996) highlights the transformative potential of “learning that comes from the negative perception of life experience.” The working artist is no stranger to distress. Becker (1951, 1963, 1982), for instance, has written extensively on the pathological consequences of professional “musicianing.” And numerous other biographies and firsthand memoirs have chronicled the problems associated with extended practice. (King & Ritz, 1993; Loam, 1950; Dance, 1990; Cross, 2005; Dixon, 1972; Gussow, 1998; Edwards, 2000; Newman, 1996; Waters, 1951;

Indeed, the “art-world” in general is a precarious place to make a living. (Becker, 1982) Average incomes for front-line cultural workers in Canada remain below average in every province.<sup>329</sup> (Hill Strategies, 2009) And older art-workers, typically ineligible for employment benefits available to members of the mainstream workforce, such as retirement security and extended healthcare, are particularly susceptible to calamity. (Woolley, 2005)

But trouble is what the blues are all about.

*Medicine, to produce health, has to examine disease; and music, to create harmony, must investigate discord.*<sup>330</sup>

Plutarch (AD 45-120)

Contrary to common understanding, however — blues music isn't sad.

<sup>329</sup> The gap is 25% in Quebec, 38% in Ontario and Prince Edward Island, and 40% or more in all other provinces. Quebec and Ontario are the only provinces where artists' earnings are above the National average — \$22,700. British Columbia and Alberta are the only other provinces where artists' average earnings exceed \$20,000.

<sup>330</sup> From *Lives: Demetrius* (sec 1).

Dissatisfied perhaps, regretful maybe, even contrite. But never maudlin or sentimental. Rather it is the ontological antidote to sad.

*The fundamental function of the blues musician . . . the most obvious as well as the most pragmatic mission of whose performance is not only to drive the blues away and hold them at bay for at least the time being, but also to invoke an ambiance of Dionysian revelry in the process.*

Albert Murray (1976, 17)

### Knowledge

This exercise acknowledges four kinds of knowledge. Knowledge by description is conceptually inferred, represented, or otherwise depicted using symbols (as in spoken and written language). Traditional classroom-based education, with its emphasis scheduled lectures and textbook study, typically relies on descriptive teaching methods. The exchange of musical knowledge over distance and across has historically depended upon the manual transcription of encoded text describing the composer-lyricist's original creative intentions. Indeed, by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, publishing companies had gained almost hegemonic control of the music industry.

But the ascendancy of radio and audio-recording during the 1920s and 30s changed all that. Focus shifted from the distribution of printed sheet music to the mass marketing of petroleum-based plastic discs. Audio recording aren't like notes on paper. They can be heard, and listened to repeatedly, by virtually everyone. Thus music can be more easily apprehended, and without the necessary mediation of someone trained in musical notation.

An interesting quandary thus emerges. Are audio recordings descriptive? Does

music itself actually “represent?” Scruton (1997) thinks not, perceiving no ontological distinction between the medium of transmission (the sound) and the subject itself (the music).

*The medium is the message.*

Marshall McLuhan (1964)

Knowledge based on authority relies upon the status or reputation of the individual from whom it is handed down, typically an institutional figure, like a priest, politician, teacher, or professor. As such, it remains a primary characteristic of formal transmissive pedagogy.

Authority in the blues similarly derives from seniority and experience. Indeed, contemporary practice remains “traditional” in the sense that the past is revered.

*Authority without wisdom is like an axe without an edge — fitter to bruise than to polish.*

Anne Bradstreet, 1664<sup>331</sup>

Ultimate authority in the blues, however, resides with authenticity. The first wave of African American bluesmen and women — early 20th century pioneers like Charlie Patton,<sup>332</sup> Bessie Smith,<sup>333</sup> Robert Johnson,<sup>334</sup> and Lonnie Johnson<sup>335</sup> — were the undisputed “real” thing. Their brazen originality, passed along through successive generations of dedicated blues people like Lottie Graves, Willie Dixon, T-Bone Walker, Albert Collins, Chuck Berry, Big Joe Duskin, and Long John Baldry — inspires practice to this day.

<sup>331</sup> From *Meditations Divine and Moral* (ch12) by English-American writer-poet Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

<sup>332</sup> c.1887-1934

<sup>333</sup> 1894-1937

<sup>334</sup> 1911-1938

<sup>335</sup> 1899-1970

*Authentic creation is a gift for the future.*

Albert Camus<sup>336</sup> (1942)

Knowledge gleaned by acquaintance is firsthand knowledge, immediate and physical, eyewitness, in-your-face, sensory knowledge — demonstrated and performed rather than merely described. As such, it's equivalent to “learning from experience.” Experiential knowledge is commonly gleaned through trial and error, typically involving “common sense.”

*Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.*

Albert Einstein<sup>337</sup> (attr.)

Working musicians are well acquainted with opprobrium, warranted or otherwise. Everyone, it seems, has an opinion — managers, agents, publicists, A&R men, radio programmers, etc. Live audiences, by virtue of their paid admission, are frequently keen to disparage, whether qualified to pass fair judgment or not. Repudiation is often rendered on the spot, in simple “thumbs up-thumbs down” fashion, and expressed in a variety of ways, from silent disavowal to hurled epithets and tossed beer bottles. Performers are thus advised to develop thick-skinned resistance to ill-informed appraisals, lest vital self-confidence be eroded.

The intoxicating properties of excessive approval are similarly suspect. Better to rely on critical reflection, and the courage of one's own convictions.

*Do what thy manhood bid thee do. From none but self expect applause.*

Sir Richard Burton<sup>338</sup> (1821-1890)

<sup>336</sup> Albert Camus (1913-1960) French Algerian existential philosopher and author, awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957.

<sup>337</sup> 1879-1955

<sup>338</sup> English explorer, writer, and diplomat. From *The Kasidah of Haji Abdu El-Yazdi* (pt.VIII, st. 37).

Acquaintanceship can also refer to persons with whom one is more intimately familiar. I am fortunate during my career as a musician to have engaged personally with a number of authentic blues “heroes.” (Murray, 1973)

*The older I grow, the more I am convinced that there is no education that one can get from books and costly apparatus that is equal to that which can be gotten from great men and women.*<sup>339</sup>

Booker T. Washington, 1891

But not every such encounter was entirely positive. Bo Diddley for instance, was cranky and difficult to deal with. And Chuck Berry, as we all know (pp169-170), is less than saintly. But, at least those guys were honestly unpleasant. It’s the phonies I can’t abide, fraudulently famous for being unfailingly friendly.

*They smile in your face.  
All the time they want to take your place*<sup>340</sup>

The O’Jays, 1972

Knowledge by participation is that which enables an organism to successfully negotiate the processes and structures that hazard its immediate environment. As such, it is adaptive, evolutionary, and mimetic. Occupational blues practice, predicated on the establishment and maintenance of productive relations within the artistic community, its performing members, their mercantile partners, and the consuming public — is by its nature participatory.

*Let’s work together.*<sup>341</sup>

Wilbert Harrison, 1962

<sup>339</sup> Excerpted from *Up from Slavery*, written in 1891 by Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

<sup>340</sup> Excerpted song lyric, from *Back Stabbers*, released in 1972 on UA-EMI by the Philadelphia-based O’Jays.

<sup>341</sup> Song title, recorded in 1962 by N. Carolina-born Wilbert Harrison (1929-1994), written by Leiber & Stoller.

### Six perspectives on teaching

As previewed in the introductory section (pp22-23), this study acknowledges six perspectives on teaching: the transmissive, developmental, nurturing, social reform, apprenticeship and lateral or “peer” mentoring. (Pratt, 1998; Ellinger, 2002)

The transmissive approach (hierarchically structured, content oriented, and institution-based) is a primary characteristic of formal education. Though commonly associated with instrumental learning, transmissive teaching can also render transformative and communicative effects. For example, as an undergraduate at Langara College I took two full terms of Chinese language instruction. Having grown up with the Western (Roman) alphabet, mastery of the ancient Oriental pictographic system proved problematic. A “disorienting dilemma” thus naturally ensued, generating genuine appreciation for how *other* people from *other* cultures go about constructing and communicating thought.

Blues practice seems rather more in line with a developmental approach to instruction, particularly with regard to cultivating participants’ gradual improvement over time, and finding new ways to apply existing skills. Some musicians, for instance, first engage the blues after having already attained high levels of facility in other genres, typically classical music and jazz. Whereas relatively few blues players read music, classical and jazz musicians tend to be formally educated — instrumentally adept and fluent in complex notation. Blues music, however, is relatively simple — and success sometimes eludes the over-qualified.

*You can't get too jazzy with the blues.*

Sunnyland Slim (in Oliver, 1960)

A nurturing perspective on teaching is somewhat akin to the developmental approach. The qualities associated with nurturing, however, are generally regarded as maternal in nature, and, while female participation in the blues is historically important and widespread, the contemporary blues workplace is predominantly male. (Davis, 1998; Cohn, 1993)

Professional musicianeering is traditionally associated with elevated rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, health problems and other pathological traits (Herer, 2000; 2005; Brodsky, 1994; Pruett, 2004) Therefore, encouraging youthful participation in the blues could well be construed as irresponsible, not unlike contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and clearly inconsistent with the nurturing perspective's fundamental tenet — “do no harm.” (T'Kenye, 1998)

Blues practice would similarly appear to resonate with a social reform approach to teaching, especially given the oppressive circumstances surrounding its genesis. We are reminded, however, that for African Americans living under Jim Crow, promoting social reform would have been a deadly serious undertaking.

Accordingly, the protest ethos generally finds scant purchase in the blues, even today.

*Blues stood as a definite statement from “outside the system,” but was it true protest music? On the surface, most of its lyrics seemed not to address political, social, and racial issues . . . The folk-singers, they sang protest songs [and] spirituals and gospel were viewed as music of the black political struggle. Modern jazz had a decidedly militant element. But blues? Not so . . .*

Lawrence, Cohn (1993, 379)

That is not to say the blues community of practice is socially unaware. Rather, it



tends to favour charity and benevolence, as characterized by the ubiquitous benefit concert in support of struggling individuals and embattled community organizations. (Watson, 1996, 122-144) Indeed, during four decades as a working musician, I have entertained the troops at countless such events.

*It is not rebellion itself that ennobles, but the demands it makes upon us.*

Albert Camus (1942)

The apprenticeship arrangement seems to resonate well with teaching and learning in occupational blues practice. Customarily associated with the mercantile trades, with instruction and certification generally administered through sanctioned guilds, associations, trade unions, and government agencies — traditional apprenticeships are well suited to young persons seeking secure and dependable employment. As such, they are typically engaged both in good faith and with parental consent. But blues practice is historically neither secure nor dependable, with aspirants usually entering service on blind faith and without parental support.

Or so it was for me.

Becker (1956) has noted the tendency for human beings to strongly self-identify within their chosen profession, with occupational communities binding together informally as social entities through shared experience. Indeed, CoPs have existed for centuries, with roots in medieval merchant guilds and artisans' associations. (Wenger, 2000; Schon, 1983; Senge, 1990) But such organizations need not be formally constituted. Indeed, they may not even be aware of their own existence. (Wenger, 2002)

Communities of practice are joint enterprises in the sense that they are collectively understood and continually renegotiated by their members, the goal being to establish “common ground.” (Clark and Brennan, 1991). Such communities normally seek to maintain continuity, evolution and regeneration, through the ongoing “recruitment” of new members. (Becker, 1951; 1963)

Today’s community of occupational blues practice is global in scope, comprising numerous national, regional, and local sub-entities. More than a century removed from its genesis among impoverished agricultural workers in rural Mississippi, blues music is today heard worldwide, performed by men and women of diverse ethnicity and cultural tradition, and in many languages other than English.<sup>342</sup>

*In Buenos Aries, Stockholm, Copenhagen, London, Berlin, Paris, Rome, in fact, in every large city of the earth where lonely, disinherited [people] for pleasure or amusement, the orgiastic wail of the blues, and their strident offspring jazz, can be heard.*

Richard Wright (in Oliver, 1960, xiii)

Learning and teaching in the blues thus entails a variety of forms and procedures. Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), for example, is a model of situated social learning which finds the educand functioning within a particular community of practice at different levels depending on his or her ability, authority, or seniority. (Lave & Wenger, 1991) Viewed separately, legitimization refers to the power relations at play. A formal view tends to privilege status acquired through domain knowledge or hierarchical rank and authority, but legitimacy can also be gained by acceptance through informal consensus within the group. Peripherality refers to an individual’s social rather than physical position in relation to the community. This in turn is affected by the character of past relations within the

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<sup>342</sup> See: [www.electricbluesclub.co.uk](http://www.electricbluesclub.co.uk)

group and future expectations of same. (Ibid.)

The blues jam session, described by Cameron (1954) as a recreational practice of an occupational elite, is the embodiment of non-formal workplace LPP. Traditionally presided over by a panel of senior community members, with local hopefuls vying to make a good impression, and visiting professionals occasionally dropping by to enliven the mix. — the jam is a place for musicians and singers to “hone” their skills. Definition of the term “hone” invokes the common English word “home,” as in to “hone in” on a particular idea or an aesthetic. An alternative meaning recalls the Old Norse *hun*, meaning “whetstone,” as in “to sharpen.”

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is a term coined by Soviet-era Russian theorist Lev Vygotsky referring to the figurative “gap” between what a person can learn unaided and what they can learn with expert assistance and corroboration. Highlighting the value of positive social interaction between participants of unequal knowledge or expertise, ZPD describes the imagined “space” between a learner’s present or “actual” level of aptitude and their “potential.” This space is normally developed through “internalization,” a concept articulating how social and physical activities develop to become ingrained mental activities. (Vygotsky, 1979; summarized in Wertsch & Johnson, 1995)

Accordingly, the product of social interaction is figuratively “ingested” by the learner, and then thoughtfully self-represented in order to “make sense.”

Normally reluctant to seize immediate possession of new knowledge, learners typically for a time remain dependent on arms-length support, or scaffolding. Indeed, some remain stuck in this position, unable (or unwilling) to venture forth alone, content to merely copy or emulate. The final stage of Vygotsky’s model,

however, recognizes the learner's complete transition to unique and independent agent, with full ownership of their knowledge, and confidence in its usefulness. (Ibid.)

Lesser known, perhaps, is Vygotsky's concept of "play" as an extension of the individual learner's imagination. Play is defined in terms of people extending themselves to the farther extents of creative possibility, while still adhering to certain rules (all organized play being defined by rules). (Ibid.)

Thus, even while engaged in purposeful work-related activity — musicians are said to be "playing" their instruments.

Lateral or "peer" mentoring (Ellinger, 2002) is the teaching perspective most germane to my own workplace education experience. Lateral mentoring among blues musicians tends to involve transgenerational same-sex peer friendships between members of the same instrumental subgroup — guitarists, bass-players, drummers, singers, etc. Such learning relationships are the stuff of legend. The following account, culled from Escott & McEwen (2004), highlights the musical education of one Hiram "Hank" Williams.<sup>343</sup>

*It was probably in Georgiana, Alabama in 1934 that young Hank (age 11) met his first acknowledged musical influence, a black street musician named Rufus Payne. His nickname was "Tee-Tot," a pun on teetotaler, which he most definitely wasn't. Born in 1884 on the Payne Plantation in Sandy Ridge, Alabama, Rufus' parents moved to New Orleans around 1890, giving him a front-row seat for the birth of jazz. With hunched back and long arms that extended almost to his knees, he would play guitar on the streets, sometimes in the company of other black musicians, with a "jazz-horn" (kazoo) around his neck, and a cigar box on the ground in front of him where people would throw money.*

<sup>343</sup> Hiram King "Hank" Williams (1923-1953), iconic American country western singer, and composer of classic tunes such as *Hey Good Lookin'*, *Honky Tonk Blues*, and *Cold Cold Heart*.

*Crowds of kids would follow Tee-Tot around, but Hank was the only one who wanted to do more than listen. He wanted to learn. Exactly what passed between Hank Williams and Rufus Payne will never be known. Payne certainly gave Hank “lessons,” but it’s hard to know what was actually imparted. Hank probably already knew most of the chords that Payne knew, so perhaps the instruction involved broader strokes.*

*Rufus always stressed the importance of keeping time and getting a good rhythm going. Indeed, one of the elements that would later set Hank apart from his contemporaries was the irresistible drive to his music. He was never a particularly accomplished musician, but his bands would always take their cue from his forceful rhythm guitar playing.*

*Payne died in a charity hospital in Montgomery, Alabama on 17 March, 1939. He was on welfare at the time, and his trade was marked “unknown” on the death certificate. As unfashionable as it was at the time for white musicians to acknowledge the influence of black musicians, Hank went out of his way to give Payne full credit. “All the music training I ever had was from him,” he told the Montgomery Advertiser in 1951.*

My learning experience in the blues wasn’t entirely dissimilar. Yes, I was a white kid, born in England in 1949, not Mississippi in 1923. And, instead of New Orleans, Louisiana I moved as a youngster with my family to Vancouver, Canada. But I too had no formal music lessons, and was heavily influenced by older, more experienced artists.

With the exception of the Englishman Baldry, however, the time spent watching, listening, and performing with those folks was relatively brief. Peer partnerships nourished by participation with fellow musicians in my local occupational group — the Lavin brothers (Tom and Jack), Doc Fingers, Hans Staymer, Jim Byrnes, Bruce Fairbairn, Billy Cowsill, Kenny Wayne, and Johnny Ferreira *et al* — were more enduring.

## Eight Kinds of Intelligence

At age eight, on the very first day of public school in Alberta, I was skipped ahead two grades, from Gr. 3 to Gr. 5. Was I so much smarter than the rest? Principal Henderson seemed to think so. What prompted his exceedingly hasty evaluation? It must have been that darned test.

Yes, I did perform well in the verbal-linguistic part. But, I was fresh from a 1950s-era English primary school, where erudition, penmanship, and spelling were drummed into children's' heads early on. My perfect score was simply the normal product of a front-loaded, old-world education system, and not indicative of any particular brilliance on my part. In retrospect, however, particularly considering my subsequent success as a composer and lyricist, I do acknowledge perhaps possessing a modicum of heightened acuity in that area.

The same, however, cannot be said of logical-mathematical intelligence. Yes, the English school system c.1957 was similarly effective in promoting numeracy among young children. Consequently, at eight years-old, I was reasonably skilled in basic arithmetic. Middle school maths also went fairly well. But, by the later high school grades, I'd completely lost the handle.

Thus prompted at age sixteen to consider becoming a professional musician, I taught myself to play electric guitar by listening to Rock & Roll records on the radio. All music is mathematically structured to some extent, and advanced theory is highly numerative by nature. Playing the blues, however, is a relatively uncomplicated undertaking. Algebra, thankfully, is not required. Accordingly, my ongoing inability to properly master the fundamentals of music notation suggests a deficiency in the "logical-mathematical" realm.

Erikson's research indicates a degree of correlation between logical-mathematical and visual-spatial intelligence. (Ibid.) It is not uncommon for people with an abundance of the latter to possess heightened hand-eye coordination, with many becoming artists and musicians. Perhaps this link played a role in my case. Indeed, music has always presented itself to me in geometric shapes and polygonal relationships.

Body-kinesthetic intelligence is related to physical movement. People so gifted tend to make good athletes and dancers. I was sporty as a kid, and in junior high could do the *boogaloo*. But falling behind socially effectively truncated my terpsichorean development. Thus it's hard to say how good I might have been. But musicians aren't generally renowned for their ability anyway. Indeed, the goal is rather opposite — to control and manipulate the rhythm so that *others* might feel so inclined.

*I refuse to dance. And I can't dance anyway. I'm not in a band for that.*

Liam Gallagher<sup>344</sup> (attr.)

Auditory-musical intelligence is related to hearing and sense of pitch. Gardner (1993) suggests that those with talent in this area, in addition to naturally excelling at music, also tend to learn better from oral lectures. My latter-day success at university perhaps supports this view. My habit of playing "by ear" is similarly demonstrative.

*The ear is the avenue to the heart.*

Voltaire<sup>345</sup> (attr.)

<sup>344</sup> Manchester-born William John Paul "Liam" Gallagher (b. 1972) is an English musician and songwriter best known as the lead singer of English rock band Oasis.

<sup>345</sup> Pseudonym of Francois Marie Arouet (1694-1778)

People with heightened interpersonal communications acuity tend to be extroverted, charismatic, charming, convincing, and diplomatic. Accordingly, they function well in group situations and tend to succeed in sales, advertising, and politics.

Though having enjoyed a more than a modicum of music business success — I am not a “natural” performer. The challenges associated with roaming back and forth between England and Canada as a youngster, and being skipped ahead two grades ahead in the process, were more than enough to diminish any genetically pre-disposed social skills I may have thereunto possessed. Becoming a professional “entertainer” as a teen-ager was, for me, a compensatory process aimed at filling the social-psychological void generated by my profoundly unfulfilling K-12 experience.

*All you need to succeed in showbiz is self-confidence. And if you can fake that — you’ve got it made.*

Anon.

Intrapersonal communication involves the ability to self-reflect, and is typically associated with religious and philosophical activity. Critics argue that it is a vague, unmeasurable human attribute, more like a secondary personality trait. Supporters, however, maintain that the ability to objectively judge one’s own weaknesses and strengths is a highly useful form of cognitive insight.

An eighth intelligence category relates to the way people interact with their natural surroundings. Loosely dubbed existential intelligence, it highlights sensitivity towards, or capacity for, conceptualizing and engaging questions about the meaning of life. (Gardner, 1995; 1999) What then does an education mean?



## Eight Stages of Life

Among the assortment of interpretive instruments here posited, Erikson's eight-stage model of human existence enjoys the broadest temporal range — a lifelong journey these days, on global average, of approximately 67.2 yrs.<sup>346</sup>

Human existence is thus seen to unfold in eight successive “acts,” with the quality of progress through each in part determined by the measure of success (or lack of success) attained in all the previous ones. Personal development is thus conceived in terms of structural integrity. (Erikson, 1959; 1982) Accordingly, just as an unsound foundation can cause a building to teeter and collapse, a person's intellectual and psychological well-being is contingent upon the stability of previously erected conceptual frameworks and meaning schemes.

The preceding story began by describing circumstances and events which molded and defined my nascent personality. Infancy (<1.5) and early childhood (<3) are where the seeds of familial security and trust are initially sown. Genital stage (3-6) activity centred around Mt. Stewart Primary School, in London, England, where I learned to read and write, do my sums, play sports, and relate autonomously to other kids.

Interestingly, it was around this time that I first heard “the blues.”

Stage-four childhood (6-12) is where children normally acquire the basic instrumental and social skills demanded by society at large, the task being to construct a strong and healthy self-image while avoiding role confusion and

<sup>346</sup> People tend to live longest (80+ yrs.) in Canada, Europe, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and Scandinavia. In the U.S. and Great Britain it's 77-80. Mexico and parts of South America follow at 75-77. China (72-75) is doing better than both India (70-72) and Russia (67-70), with Africa (<50) far behind. Source: [http://www.who.int/topics/life\\_expectancy/en/](http://www.who.int/topics/life_expectancy/en/)

unwanted feelings of inferiority.

*No one can make you feel inferior without your consent.*<sup>347</sup>

Eleanor Roosevelt, 1937

Elementary school — eight years-old, the new kid in town (fresh off the boat), skipped two grades ahead, and three years younger than my classmates, arbitrarily distanced from my peer group, with no support system (academic or otherwise) to ameliorate the situation — that’s where things went wrong for me.

Becker (1951, 1963, 1982) notes that people disaffected in such a manner are more prone to recruitment by groups that have similarly segregated themselves from mainstream affairs, such as religious cults and civilian militia. They are also more likely to become involved in deviant occupational practice and engage in self-destructive activities such as the use of drugs and alcohol.

The goal in young adulthood (18-30) is to achieve some degree of personal intimacy, as opposed to living in social isolation. This is where romantic relationships are first entertained, and forays into domesticity initiated. My “coming of age” coincided with advent of the sexual revolution, during which (as an aspiring rock musician) I was propitiously positioned.

*The term “sexual revolution” refers to a series of changes in social thought and behaviour throughout the Western world during the 1960s and early 1970s, beginning with the gradual de-conditioning of traditional antecedents, and the development of new morality behavioural codes, many of which have been integrated into the contemporary mainstream. Examples include the growing acceptance of premarital sex, birth control, public nudity, the legalization of abortion, and homosexuality.*

<sup>347</sup> Excepted from *My Story*, written in 1937 by U.S. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962).

*Suggested triggers include (a) the development of “the pill” in 1960, which granted females reproductive choice, and (b) enhanced financial independence gained by women who entered the workforce in greater numbers during and after World War II.*

*The “hippie” movement of the mid-late 1960s heralded an emerging counter-culture of youthful “free love” advocates who celebrated unrestrained sexuality as normal part of everyday life. The free love ethos proliferated widely in various forms throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, but its more assertive manifestations ended abruptly in the mid-late 1980s with emergence of AIDS. (Allyn, 2000)*

Stage seven comprises middle adulthood (ca. 25-55), and includes the period during which we are most likely involved with raising children. The task here involves cultivating the proper balance between generativity and stagnation. Generativity is characterized by a genuine concern for others and for future generations. Stagnation, on the other hand, is a maladjustment analogous to the proverbial “mid-life crisis” where men and women approaching maturity tend to look back on their lives and wonder . . .

*Is that all there is.*<sup>348</sup>

Peggy Lee, 1969

Stage eight, referred to as late-adulthood or maturity, begins roughly around age sixty. First comes a gradual detachment from society, as older folks retire from jobs they’ve held for decades and discover that their input is no longer as highly valued and sought after. Aging also augers a sense of biological obsolescence. (Biggs, 1999). Mature women normally encounter menopause, and erectile dysfunction is not uncommon among older males.

Then there are the illnesses associated with seniority, such as arthritis, diabetes,

<sup>348</sup> Song title. Written by Leiber and Stoller, recorded by American jazz singer Peggy Lee in 1969.

heart problems, and the various cancers. The spectre of mortality looms. Friends die. Loved ones pass on. The task in later life, therefore, is to develop and maintain a healthy measure of ego integrity (wisdom) while minimizing desperation and despair.

Accordingly, some older folks become preoccupied with “the good old days,” reveling in the comfort of earlier triumphs and successes. Others, however, tend to be more regretful, choosing instead to focus on their failures, faulty decisions, and missed opportunities. Thus, many older people become depressed, morose, spiteful, paranoid and hypochondriacal — in effect developing symptoms of senility prematurely, and often without direct physiological cause.

*Were it not better to forget  
Than to remember — and regret?*<sup>349</sup>

### The Meaning of an Education

I used to hate Principal Henderson for skipping me ahead in school, and would curse him every time I cursed myself for ever taking up the guitar. What if we’d never emigrated. And what if I’d been allowed to proceed through school in “real time” and not so oddly “out of phase?” I might have made an entirely different career choice, and instead become a businessman, a bureaucrat (bungling or otherwise), or a bus driver (like my Cockney grandad).

But “what if?” is a mug’s game. No earthly use to anyone. Things are what what they are. You have to play the cards you’re dealt. Even so.

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<sup>349</sup> Excerpted from *Despondency*, by Letitia Elizabeth Landon (1802-1838)

*The allotments of Providence, when coupled with trouble and anxiety, often conceal from finite vision the wisdom and goodness in which they are sent; and, frequently, what seemed a harsh and invidious dispensation, is converted by after experience into a happy and beneficial arrangement.*

Frederick Douglass,<sup>350</sup>1855

This is an ideal place to acknowledge the wisdom and goodness of people like Brian Pendleton and Jim Plaszek, who welcomed me into the Pacific Rim Program at Langara College, as did John Webb in English, and Roz Scarnell in Geography. Their combined pedagogies helped propel my timely transfer to the Faculty of Arts at UBC, where Heath “Pete” Chamberlain and Paul Tennant together invited me to join the Department of Political Science (POLI).

Adult Education professor Dan Pratt, a neighbourhood acquaintance, introduced me to his ADED colleague Roger Boshier (my original *pro-tem*). Carl Leggo was the first to indicate that this project might find purchase in Curriculum Studies (CUST), and Linda Farr-Darling, temporarily charged with “rounding up strays” for the department, managed to keep me in the CUST corral during the difficult period following the breakup of my marriage.

Lyn Fels’s insightful section on performative research methods helped assuage my initial “fish out of water” misgivings. And Jerry “the Hammer” Wasserman, whose course on African American literature opened the door to a deeper understanding of “the blues” than one could have imagined — continues to test some of my less exacting scholarly proclivities. But fondest kudos are reserved for Tony Clarke, who’s had my back since the beginning — especially when I felt like giving up and tried to tender my resignation. “You can’t,” he said. “I won’t let you.”

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<sup>350</sup>Born Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey(1818 -1895), escaped slave, orator, writer, and statesman. From *My Bondage and my Freedom* (1855)

## Conclusion

Thanks to you, the reader, for having persevered this far. One trusts that (a) “The Story” was entertaining (b) that the narrative rang true (c) that its performative delivery didn’t undermine its scholarly effectiveness (d) that the “instrumental” model of analysis made good sense, and that (e) the study’s four fundamental thesis questions have been adequately addressed.

Indeed, what role did K-12 education play in my decision to become a working musician? How then did I subsequently acquire the technical facility, the social dexterity, and the ontological assurance required to function productively in such a role? What role did occupational deviance play with respect to the nature and quality of my latter-day engagement with higher education? And, what role does education continue to play in my ongoing life and career?

Some might suggest that the foregoing questions are intrinsically subjective, and thus unfairly easy to resolve. Not so. An honest autobiography — rendered in an aesthetically entertaining, academically acceptable, and pedagogically useful manner — is an exceedingly demanding item to produce.

“Just be yourself,” said Willie Dixon. (p145) Good advice — but much, much easier said than done.

First you need to figure out who you are.

*Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught.*<sup>351</sup>

Oscar Wilde, 1894

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<sup>351</sup> From *A Few Maxims for the Use of the Overeducated*, written by Englishman Oscare Wilde (1854-1900), published anonymously in the 17 November 1894 edition of Saturday Review.

*Note: The following bibliography is a comprehensive chart of all the various investigative routes taken, including detours and dead-ends.*



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