

**Springsteen, A Three-Minute Song,
A Life of Learning**

**by
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Abstract

This dissertation is an autobiographical and educational rendering of Bruce Springsteen's influence on my life. Unbeknownst to him, Bruce Springsteen became my first proper 'professor.' Nowhere near the confines of a regular classroom, he opened the door to a kind of education like nothing I ever got in my formal schooling. From the very first notes of the song "Born in the U.S.A.," he seized me and took me down a path of alternative learning. In only four minutes and forty seconds, the song revealed how little I knew of the world, despite all of my years in education, being a teacher, and holding senior positions. Like many people, I had thought that education was gained from the school system. One song changed everything. It made me question the very definition of education and what it means to be educated. This work, through life writing, examination of lived experience and deep sustained reflection, represents my educational journey. It describes my 'other' education, the kind of learning discovered through my passion for the music of Springsteen and the lyrics and delivery of his songs. I unpack these experiences of life and learning in terms of contemporary educational literature and dis-courses. This allows me to interpret how my 'other' education was formed in light of Springsteen, his songs, live performances and some of his observations. I make a case in this dissertation for the contribution of popular song as a potent force for learning and transformation. I aim to open the door to further the potential for rock and popular music in educational practice.

Keywords: Springsteen; Born in the U.S.A; Lived experience; Arts; War; Life Writing; Schooling

Dedication

To my parents Mr. Charan S. Thindal and Mrs. Gurdip K. Thindal, who moved countries and continents, first from India to England for me and my older sister, and then from England to Canada for my two younger sisters, to provide their children with the best possible education. Wherever you are looking down from, Mum and Dad, this is for you.

This is also dedicated to my boys, Sacha and Andreas. If I have done nothing of consequence with my time on earth, bringing you both home was, by far, the best thing I ever did.

Finally, to Carolline, my life partner and wife, whose patience I tested beyond any norm with my overindulgence in this work, whose love and commitment to our little family shone above anything else. May your reward(s) now begin.

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Chapter 1. Introduction and Awakening

1.1. Introduction

We are awash with stories, we live stories all the time, we attend to stories of others.

(Leggo 2010)

This dissertation is a story of a how a popular song took me from my comfortable living room in a village in South Yorkshire to the My Lai village massacre and other unfathomable horrors that occurred in the Vietnam war. This very story sent me on a quest to ask why and how such atrocities could occur. That search for the ‘why’ and ‘how’ revealed a very different world to the one I was living in, a world where such horrors have continued to take place, often in the name of ‘democracy,’ a ‘noble cause,’ or the newly re/framed ‘war on terror.’ It is also a story of my education and how I came to understand it through one song. How a popular song became the pedagogical tool to enable this learning journey to occur sits at the heart of this work. The seeds for this work were sown, without me realizing, in the summer of 1984, with my first listening to Bruce Springsteen’s album *Born in the U.S.A.* The opening title track had a devastating effect on me. However, there was another song from that LP that raised the question that initiated this work decades later. The first track on side two¹ is a song about friendship, called “No Surrender.” I remember it to this day, roaring out of my speakers with the opening lines:

We busted out a class had to get away
from those fools
We learned more from a three-minute record
than we ever learned in school

(Springsteen 1984)

These four lines have been swimming in my head since the very first time they entered my ears on June 4, 1984. They made me wonder how and if anyone could really “learn more from a three-minute record” than years of schooling? It sounded preposterous to me at the time and I dismissed it as antics of a rock star in search of a good lyric for a

¹ It appears as track 7 on the CD *Born in the U.S.A.*, I first heard it on the vinyl LP.

song. Nonetheless, the question seeped into my bones and lived there for decades, only to resurface as I embarked on these doctoral studies. Over time, it prompted another question, which then led to another, and yet another: how do we really get educated? What does it mean to be educated? What is education? How can we actually see the world we are living in? How do I make sense of the world I live in? These questions are explored in this work through examining my lived experience.

In an effort to answer these seemingly simple questions, I came to realize their deep complexity. An obvious answer to most of them, or so I thought, was ‘through education,’ or for the pragmatic, ‘through schools or schooling.’ Yet, a closer examination revealed that is not always the case. I needed to move away from generally taken for granted concepts and have a better understanding of things like ‘education,’ ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ before I could formulate any serious answers.

This then becomes a story of education, a concept that turned out to be really difficult to define. It is a story of my schooling and its failure. It is also a story of the success of my education, but not in the sense that we normally think of success. In the summer of 1984, there I was, a newly qualified teacher at the start of establishing my career, when one unusual lunch time, a popular song opened the door to my ‘other education’ that Brooks (2009) speaks of. Though I did not know it at the time, it felt very real and consuming, like none of my formal education had ever felt. Stories told through song filled my world with meaning and helped me make sense of the world. This work is an effort to explain how real learning can take place in alternative ways. I share my story of education with hope that it resonates with others and helps bring meaning to their own education and life journey. As Richard Miller (2005) reminded me, “This is my story. But it is not my story only” (p.176). It may also be, at least in some parts, the story of others.

What I demonstrate in this dissertation is how I began to make sense of the world through that ‘other education.’ Over time, my ‘other education,’ the kind where real learning took place – where I *found* myself, so to speak. What is relevant here is that this education did not involve a classroom or a teacher, none of the things I had come to associate with education, teaching or learning. Through my ‘other education,’ I met several ‘teachers’ and many ‘classrooms,’ but none were in the confines of schools, colleges or university buildings. No, these ‘teachers’ were ordinary citizens, in the natural environments of their living or dwelling. With one exception, none of them were formally

qualified teachers. The one who is, I accidentally 'met' one night watching the BBC 2's *The Late Show*. The most prominent of these 'teachers' is a musician, an American rock star, a singer songwriter and performer by the name of Bruce Springsteen. I will later describe where my journey started, why and how Springsteen's music and performance kicked down the doors and led the way of my 'other education.'

This work highlights a practical challenge of viewing education in a broader way, one that expands and enhances the typical notions of curriculum and schooling, in ways that may be more inviting and engaging to students and teachers alike. I explain this vision with a narrative account of my own educational journey vis-à-vis popular music, in particular a passion I developed for Springsteen's music. I make a case for the contribution of popular music to the education of young people. Using my own story and experiences, I show the potential for popular and rock music in educational practice.

This dissertation involved the examination of my own learning through life experiences and my passion for Springsteen's music, with particular attention to his lyrics and the power of sound and live performances. It required the unpacking of certain life experiences within the framework of contemporary educational literature and discourses, which allowed me to interpret what formed my 'real education,' as I now call it. I juxtapose it with the learning I received through the formal system of schooling that existed in the U.K. in the late sixties, seventies and early eighties. With Springsteen as my teacher and "Born in the U.S.A." as my guiding text, the world became my classroom for a lesson that transformed my life and my work. He filled the gaping hole that my schooling had left me with and offered me the vehicle that opened my eyes to the real world.

I view this work as a call to be deeply human, where I see the humanity of the other in myself and mine in the other, be it in the plight of a Vietnam veteran in "Born the U.S.A." or the lives of the innocent men, women, children and babies, slaughtered and left in the fields and ditches of My Lai. When I saw the heart wrenching photograph of the My Lai massacre, I imagined the same beauty that those mothers once had in their arms holding their babies as I did when I saw our newborn in his mother's arms in 2011. This is the power of a song and a photograph, in this case, that connected me to those whose names I will never know, thousands of miles away. It is in a similar way that the

personal connects to the universal. A work of art or a piece of writing can do the same in providing that connection between the self and the other.

In the same way that the story of the protagonist in the song “Born in the U.S.A.” resonated with me, it is my hope that my story will resonate with the reader. In turn, this may open a door to the reader’s “own understanding, perception, and perhaps be moved in some way” (Snowber 2014, p. 1), just like the story in that song did for me. It was important for me to tell my story in this dissertation. I recognize that “even if no one is listening, even if no one cares, even if one responds” (Leggo 2010, p. 6), it was important for me to tell it. In telling my story, it enhanced my understanding of my professional and personal life, enabling me to see who I really am and what I can become as a human being. I recognize that when I narrate each story in this dissertation, like Leggo, “I know am really telling my story” (p. 4), even though in parts it may seem like it is about others like Springsteen, my mother or even our little boy.

I set out to explore, examine and research my lived experience and flesh it out with lifewriting. That approach was driven and supported by Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo and Sinner (2012), Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo, C. (2009), Kadar (1992), Eakin (2004), David Smith (2012), Kelly (2010, 2012), with contributions from a whole host of writers, including Van Manen (1990), Winslow (1995), Verduyn (1992), Cohen (1992) and Newman (1992). Every one of these writers provided me with valuable teachings that cemented my work and informed the authenticity in my approach. This work is best summed up by Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo, and Sinner (2012) when they state:

The individual pieces of creative nonfiction are based on the authors’ first-person experiences of coming to understand what matters most to them (and others), what sustains them (and others) and the places they inhabit, and what they have given their hearts to.

(p. xx)

I certainly gave my heart to this work and in return it gave me so much more. This dissertation is partly about my “conscious awakening” (Dobson 2012), where I had to examine myself, the roles I played personally and professionally as an educator. As a result, it provided me with the beginnings of a “phenomenological understanding of who am I and who am I becoming” (Snowber 2014, p. 2).

Critical to this dissertation has been the role of memory, mainly mine, but also that of others. I specifically draw on Stephen Smith's (1991, 1992) work on remembrances, especially 'childhood remembrances,' as well as those from teenage years, early adulthood and from some level of adult maturity, both in a personal and a professional sense. Also central to my work has been Max Van Manen's (1990) contribution to researching lived experience. The idea of examining lived experience from a scholarly perspective was new to me, and Van Manen in particular, helped me appreciate its importance as a research tool. We all have lived experience and regularly reflect on certain parts of our lived experience, but do not necessarily see it as a research tool. By scrutinizing my lived experience, I was able to examine and learn much from the experience, moving well beyond mere reflection and reminiscing. Like Hibbitts (2009), "I re-learned to look at my original experience" (p. 61) and analyze it to inform and re-form many aspects of what I thought I knew.

Much of my learning also came from the writing aspect of that lived experience. The process and the act of writing about lived experience allowed me to examine and re-examine, re-live, reflect and re-reflect on each aspect of each experience, revealing new insights at each turn. These insights connect to many data sources, as well as everyday concepts I took for granted, such as education, love, and democracy. I never imagined such data sources at the start of this dissertation.

Though I have consulted a wide range of literature, both in and out of education, almost in an eclectic fashion, my intention is that my narrative develops and offers what I have learned about education through my lived experience. I recover certain experiences and story them back to life, and in the process of storying, I have relearned the vast complexity of what is called education, but also life. It is stories that "present possibilities for understanding the complex, mysterious, even ineffable experiences that comprise human living" (Leggo 2010, p. 2), be it in a song or in a dissertation.

1.2. Awakening

The awakening of my political awareness is inextricably linked to the song “Born in the U.S.A.” This is somewhat surprising, given that Springsteen does not see himself as an “activist” but more of a “concerned citizen” (Springsteen 1998, p. 260).

Springsteen’s music has never been overtly, in your face political. Artists like Neil Young (2006) with the song “Let’s Impeach the President,” that “go for the jugular” (Goldberg 2005, p.8), openly accusing President George W. Bush for “lyin’, (...) misleading our country into war, (...) abusing all the power,” bending “the facts to fit with their story” and “leaving black people neglected.” Springsteen’s approach generally tries to detail the individual’s lived experience and leaves his political statements to be subtle or delivered in small chunks, live from the stage. Springsteen maintains that his work “has always been about judging the distance between the American reality and the American dream—how far is that at a given moment” (Springsteen 2012; McMillan 2016, p. 9).

I did not have the slightest interest in Vietnam or the war it was involved in with the U.S.A. Why would I? I was a young kid living in England and the Vietnam war was an American issue that had nothing to do with me. America and Vietnam were countries far away from my hometown of Leicester, U.K. However, it was learning about the Vietnam war many years later that began to reveal to me what was really going on in the world and more importantly, to provide answers to questions such as ‘how’ and ‘why this was possible?’ It was in understanding the Vietnam war with all its horror that gave me insight into all the wars that were still to follow, and will continue to do so well after I am gone. It was on a street in Vietnam where I first began to seriously question the notion of democracy despite having lived in one all my life and had voted in four free general elections to that point. It was ‘Vietnam’ that first revealed to me what human beings can and did do to fellow human beings, sometimes of their own volition, other times under specific or general orders, and often in the name of patriotism. It revealed to me how soldiers were in effect ‘brainwashed’ to serve their government’s wishes rather than the needs of its people. It was Vietnam that showed me for the first time the true cost of war for all concerned: human societies, their environments, families, governments, the militaries and general public, both in the U.S.A and Vietnam.

Learning about Vietnam helped me understand that “Once your eyes are open to injustice, it is hard to close them again” (Herbert, 2009, p. 340). This is especially hard

when discovering how “millions were mercilessly murdered” (Vltchek 2013, p. 9) in Laos and Cambodia. ‘Vietnam’ revealed for me that presidents lied to the people they were elected to serve, an appalling realization for the naïve. It was through ‘Vietnam’ that a stunning truth emerged: that the “United States has not declared itself to be in a state of war since 1941, something that most Americans may not realize” (Hancock & Wexler 2014, p. 1). How could this be, given the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and Korea before? We commonly call them “wars,” as Hancock & Wexler point out. How has the ‘Global War on Terror’ (an interesting notion in itself, if there ever was one) evolved to the level that justifies the killing of innocent civilians? Furthermore, how is it that the United States has gone from Vietnam to Drone Warfare (Powers 2017; Scahill 2016, Medea 2013, Gardner 2013), where the U.S. president has become the judge, jury and executioner ordering the illegal killings of suspects, including an American citizen and civilians without any trials or legal procedures? (Scahill 2013, Arnove, Coughlin, Scahill and Rowely (2013). The decision-making process as whom to kill on which day is something Waters (2019) called “disgusting beyond all belief. (...) it’s pretty scary to think of grown men sitting in a room deciding who to kill – foreign nationals – and then killing them” (para. 9). Matt Bellamy (2015), from the band Muse, gave it a specific, contemporary context: “I always perceived Obama as an all-round likable guy. But most mornings he wakes up, has breakfast and then goes down to the war room and makes what they call ‘kill decisions’” (p. 12). The detailed procedure involved in making the ‘kill decisions’ is laid bare by Scahill (2016), who maintains that “Drones are a tool, not a policy. The policy is assassination” (p.2).

I was compelled to ask, how in the world have we got to a situation where the world’s leading democracy routinely carries out “Kidnapping, Rendition, and Torture” of the most inhumane kind (Gordon 2016, p.145-159), and where “Assassination and Extrajudicial Killing” (pp.164-175) have become the norm (Mazzettie, Drew, Kovaleski, Naylor & Ismay 2015; Boal 2011; Rolling Stone 2011). After all, it is at the direction of the well-educated and highly trained personnel such work is carried out, while most of the general population is unaware. The obvious question that comes to my mind here is “what are we educating individuals for?” and “what kind of world are we educating the future generation for?”

‘Vietnam’ also showed me the power of the people and their part in bringing that war to an end. It also revealed for the first time how poorly a government of the richest

and most powerful country treated many of its patriotic soldiers upon their return to their homeland. Those 'born' in the U.S.A were no longer worthy of the U.S. government's priority once they served their purpose (Dewberry & Millen 2014, p. 84) of being 'cannon fodder' (Springsteen 2016, p. 103) for the military. Sadly, this continues to be true today for veterans of the Gulf war, the Afghanistan war and the Iraq war, and places we may not know the U.S. was at war with. It is not only the general public that is not aware of such issues, but often the U.S. Congress is oblivious or kept in the dark, as evidenced by the incident of four US soldiers killed in an ambush while on a secret Special Ops mission in Niger (Henningan 2017). However, such secret missions are nothing new, since it was "The CIA in Vietnam, in a program called 'Operation Phoenix,' [that] secretly, without trial, executed at least twenty thousand civilians in South Vietnam who were suspected of being members of the Communist underground" (Zinn 2003, p. 478). Yes, 20,000: each one a human being, maybe a brother, a sister, a mother, a father. Each one had a life, that priceless gift.

It was 'Vietnam' that exposed the lies the U.S. government told and the way they told them, similar to lies on key decisions that took the U.S. into its war with Iraq in 1991, and then with Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq again in March 2003. Such lies continue today. These lies that are all too familiar for those who learnt vital lessons from Vietnam. Patriotic soldiers and Vietnam veterans like Ellesberg (1974), Kovic (2016) and Muller (1974) among many, all learnt such lessons firsthand. Ron Kovic shares this learning, so that similar mistakes can be avoided in the future, in his powerful updated introduction to his 40th anniversary re-release *Born on the Fourth of July* (Kovic 2016, pp. 17-28). I was lucky not to see such horrors and lies firsthand, but I rage inside thinking about them. It was 'Vietnam' that showed me how and why the U.S. has got to the place where it is in the world today. It opened my eyes to some of the things that really go on in the world, and it all started with a song.

It was by examining and trying to understand the experience of that Vietnam veteran in the song "Born in the U.S.A," that I realized how my formal education was so limiting and how it had failed in preparing me to understand what was going on in our world. How is it that a song could take me from a living room in South Yorkshire to the unbelievable horrors in El Salvador, where a baby's hands were "nailed" to its decapitated head to keep it "in place" for the returning mother to see, where "it is not enough to kill children; they are dragged over barbed wire until the flesh falls from their

bones, while parents are forced to watch” (Chomsky 1993, pp. 39-40)? The same song led me to learn about war crimes that were committed in Vietnam, The Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Iraq wars, such as burying “10,000 Iraqi alive soldiers” under the sand with bulldozers in the Arabian desert (Fisk 2005 p. 849) and the unnecessary and illegal torture and killings that went on in the name of the ‘War on Terror.’ Here I was confronted with that “epistemological silence” that van Manen (1990) speaks of, the type of “silence we are confronted with when we face the unspeakable” (p.113). I was completely horrified and shocked at the brutality that went on in the world. This shock was not because I had never come across such macabre images, as I was aware of horrendous imagery from Sikh history, where human beings were tortured, sawn in half from head to toe, scalped while alive, boiled alive and worse of all, babies cut into pieces and made into necklaces for their mothers to wear, all stomach churning, all as weapons of terror for the purpose of conversion of Hindus to Islam during the expansion of the Mogul empire in the late 17th and early 18th century in India. Such images are available to any visitor in temples across northern India, in museums like the one at Mohali² or in Sikh history literature. Albeit not that long ago, that was distant history.

I naively thought humanity had advanced to a more civilized form, where such horrors were outlawed. I had come to believe such savagery and butchery were things of the past, bar the odd case of a truly disturbed individual, a mass murderer or a despot. I believed that since the horrors of the Holocaust and the subsequent creation of the *UN Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* and the *Geneva Convention*, there were rules governing wars that were being followed. My ‘other education’ revealed that this was not the case in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, nor is it at the start of the 21st century. I was compelled to ask: “what kind of a world are we living in?”

How could I be so naïve? Surely none of the above could be true, I thought to myself. How is that my formal education was so unsuccessful in providing me with a realistic picture of the world and the events that were going on? The fear emerged, that if I, a professional teacher, could walk around completely unaware of such goings on in our world, then others could, too. If our education is not fully preparing us for the world

² This museum uses statues and sculptures to demonstrate the horrific imagery from Sikh history of babies being killed and torture and murder of the most brutal kind. Some images can be seen here; <http://www.chandigarhphotos.com/Sikh-Museum-Mohali.html>

we live in, then what is it exactly preparing us for? What then, is the purpose of education, particularly formal schooling?

My formal education failed to excite or engage me in the learning process, to the point that I could not wait to just leave school and work. Sadly, I believe this is an experience shared by many. In direct contrast, one song ignited more passion and drive and got me engaged in my learning like nothing had done before. Questions started to arise about education and my education in particular, but I did not give them too much attention at the time, as I got swept away seeking answers, without realising where I was heading. Following my new interest, led by the Vietnam veteran in the song “Born in the U.S.A.” and then the Vietnam War and the country itself, felt so natural and easy, so full of intrigue. Is that not what real learning is supposed to be: natural, curiosity driven without the feeling of being educated or being taught? Maybe that is when real learning actually takes place, without the pressures of enforced curriculum, assessment, or even teachers in classrooms.

My experience is similar to that described by John Holt (1967) to demonstrate how real and effective learning takes place where conditions allow. One easy example is a story of a seven-year-old boy who, when allowed to follow his passion and is supported (outside of class) in his quest for knowledge, starts by reading an article. He develops an interest in scuba diving that leads to one thing and then another, and another, and finally the study of Greek mythology, the cities of Troy and abridged versions of the Iliad and the Odyssey.³ The other is a story from a one room village school from rural U.S.A. where as part of learning, the teacher Julia Weber provides her students with the opportunities to move from providing an answer to seeking an answer, be it to a simple or a more in-depth question: “Why did wool shrink?” (Holt 1967 p.136); “How come people are able to put out a great fat newspaper every day?” (p. 139). The way those children discover the answers to those questions are a must read for anyone eager to undertake the awesome responsibility of being an educator. I have no doubt there are many more such examples in the world, where real learning takes place as a result of excellent teaching. In my case, the visceral and emotional experience of one

³ A full citation of Holt’s example is provided in Appendix A

song created so much interest and intrigue that I felt I had no choice but to pursue every path it led me on.

This was me, not as a young boy, but a young professional teacher who never had an opportunity at any point prior to that to engage in such a learning process. I am grateful that after years of being a professional educator, I have at last had the chance to try and make sense of all this experience, to understand how I could go from listening to a popular song in 1984 to understanding why the U.S.A. has over “800 military bases around the world” (Chomsky 2007) and that ‘American Special Ops.’ have been deployed in “143 countries” that make up almost “three quarters of the nations in the world” (Henningan 2017). Why does any country need such military presence in other countries? How is this allowed? Why do host countries want these U.S. military bases on their sovereign soil? Do they want all this U.S. military presence? Who is it that makes such decisions? Is the population of that host country or is it their government? Or is it neither? Is such decision made in consultation with the public or made entirely by the government that may or may not represent the people’s interest? Is such a decision made and imposed by the U.S.? If so, how is this done? Such questions came up without any effort. This work is also about a journey of thirty-four years with its meandering paths and detours that resulted in providing some answers along the way and revealed why my formal education did not allow me to ask such questions.

Why and how Bruce Springsteen managed to get such a hold on me is partly a mystery. How popular music managed to get a similar hold is yet another mystery. How was it that no one else, with the exception of my parents, managed to affect me so much? How was it that none of my teachers, whose job was to educate me, never came close to engaging me in the learning process as much as Springsteen did? How does Springsteen still manage to do this after 36 years? These are all the questions that this work will attempt to address.

The part that is not a mystery is that music can teach us so much. Why schools do not use popular music to teach in the mainstream curriculum is part of this story. This work has provided some answers, which in my case have to do with music itself and Springsteen’s ability to connect with me and countless others. Such explanations also take up space in this dissertation. The rest is the story of how my real learning journey began and continues to this day, a journey that slowly became my epistemic agency,

revealing my relationship to knowledge and the processes through which we acquire and evaluate that knowledge. This is my story and like all true stories, it had to be “lived before it could be told” (MacIntyre 1981, p.197). This one is no exception.

It is important to note that this dissertation is not a critique of teachers. Like Carol Black (2012), I believe that there is enormously good work being done by teachers all over the world. At times, it feels as if everything that is wrong in society falls at the door of education, reinforcing President Lyndon B. Johnson’s argument that, “The answer for all our national problems comes down to a single word: education” (Bowls and Gintis 2011, p. 19). This work offers an examination of my experience of schooling, which I believe is not that dissimilar to the experience of many others in schools throughout the Western world.

I come to this endeavour with considerable experience of education, both from a practical and a theoretical perspective. I take a look at myself when I was the one doing the teaching during a 25 year-career that evolved from a full time lecturer, to senior lecturer, then Head of Section, and finally Head of Curriculum of a college of further and higher education in the U.K. My career granted me the opportunity to lead a team of experienced professional educators to develop and implement National vocational qualifications across the U.K. for Edexcel, the largest awarding body for vocational qualifications in Britain. This was followed by a role as Lead Verifier/Chief Examiner of these national qualifications, which are now standard in colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. I delivered national training events across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and offered advice to fellow educators on how best to run all three levels⁴ of the BTEC Public Services Programs in their colleges. In addition, I led a small team of writers to publish materials to support teams in colleges across the country (Thindal & Lees 1999; Thindal, J., Lees, T. & Cullingworth, N. 1998; Thindal, J., Lees, T. & Cullingworth, N. 1998a). I did all of it without ever questioning “what is education?” and “What is an educated person?”

How was this possible when I was doing the educating, not only of students but also of professional fellow educators? Trying to make sense and understand all this is at the heart of this dissertation. It was the song *No Surrender* that stirred my curiosity

⁴ These levels went from high school to initial undergraduate study though BTEC First, National and then Higher National certificates and Diplomas.

about the power of one song to teach, and the title track from the same album that revealed the answer to that question over many years, moving it from 'preposterous' to a serious inquiry. Can you really learn more from a three-minute record than school?

Chapter 2. Beginnings

2.1. Before Education

I was born in a remote village about two miles away from a small town in the Province of Punjab, in North West India. The village consisted of no more than about a hundred people and was in the middle of agricultural farmland. There was no electricity, no running cold water, let alone hot water. Most of the villagers got their water from the communal village well. Our household was lucky in that we had a tap drilled into the ground in our yard, which meant everyone in our family had ready access to cold water. Needless to say, there was no television or radio, although one or two houses did have small transistor radios where you could hear some music bellowing from time to time. The rest of the time it was just the sounds of people, animals, birds and the weather. I spent my first five years barefoot. The very first pair of shoes I ever got (and hated as they felt so alien and began to hurt my feet from rubbing) was on the way to Delhi airport when leaving for England. I did not know it at the time, but the wearing of shoes was the first sign of being made to fit into the 'civilized' world. What that act of placing leather on my bare soles did was to remove the physical touch with the earth, where I could feel each contour of the ground and what was beneath my feet, the kind of surface I walked on. To this day, I prefer to not wear shoes and make do with sandals or no shoes where I can, but it took a long time to gain the confidence to be able to do that as an adult.

My experience of those so-called formative first five years was that of a free spirit, in that I roamed around the village without a care in the world (or shoes on my feet). My outdoor environment was my "biggest teacher" in the same way "the sea" was often Snowber's (2009, p.151). My childhood was exactly as Smith (1991) described: "a time of freer existence, of playfulness and openness to what the world has to offer" (p. 161). The world was indeed offering, and I was taking. I remember trying to stop a small snake trying to go down into a hole in the ground by pulling its tail. After some tugging of 'back and forth,' the small snake trying desperately to go into the hole and me pulling it back, my mother saw me and stopped me. I do not remember being fearful of any living thing I came across. How that was to change later in life! Tigers, alligators or other dangerous animals, I never came across. The only time I had a momentary concern for my safety was the first time I saw an elephant. There were sounds of excitement and a

rush of people through the alleyways of our tiny village the first time an elephant was brought in. In my five-year-old life, I had never seen such an enormous animal, taller than our single-story home. I was in awe, combined with momentary fear, as I looked up at the massive, slowly moving thing. My fear was alleviated when I noticed two people sitting what looked to be behind its head, guiding it gently through the village. If they can sit on top of that huge moving, living breathing mountain with its legs the size of tree trunks, then I want to sit there too and have such a ride, I thought. Fear is something I do not ever remember feeling in those first five years. Yet, growing up in England, I was full of fear: fear of dogs, fear of crime, fear of skinheads, fear of getting beaten-up, even fear of traffic. As I now watch my own young children play, they also do not see or feel fear until they are told not to do something for the 'fear' that they will hurt themselves. Of course, they learn fear of things through their own lived experience of once hurting themselves and being fearful of doing it again, but that is a different story.

I remember one incident from those most joyous five years that affected me in a profound way. I was around four and half years old and was playing by myself near the water trough where the bullocks drank. I saw some worms on the ground and decided to get some salt and sprinkle it on them, to see what would happen. The worms started to wriggle and move quickly. Seeing this, I laughed. That was when my mother caught me in the corner of her eye. She came over and saw what I had done as I proudly pointed to my achievement. She immediately threw some fresh clean water on the worms and then looked at me. I was confused as to why she poured clean water on my little experiment and thought that she was going to offer me an explanation. I obviously must have been a demanding child in that I expected an explanation of her actions. That was not to come. What did come was this: she sat me down on her knee and asked me what the worms had done to me for me to hurt them with salt. I was at a loss and could not answer. It seemed such a strange question because it was obvious the worms had not done anything to me. She continued to tell me that I had no right to hurt or worse still, kill any living thing that did not threaten or hurt me. I asked why? Her answer, that has stayed with me to this day was, "they are all God's creatures and every one of them has a purpose on this earth." She continued: "It is not for you and me to know what that purpose is but accept that they have one and that they are fulfilling it." She further insisted, "It is not for me or you to deliberately end their life."

This was coming from an 'uneducated' woman who had never attended a minute in a school classroom. Such was the tradition of a Punjabi village girl in those times. Where she got such wisdom, I have often wondered. Maybe she knew that "We are not separate from the earth, but part of it" (Snowber 2016, p.78). She exemplified Snowber's statement that "We understand this viscerally, deep in our bones and under our skin, there is a sense that we are all part of the DNA of the universe" (ibid). My mother never had books on environmental education or ecology and had they been available to her, she could not read. Carolyn Merchant (1983) explains: "Women and nature have an age-old association - an affiliation that has persisted throughout culture, language, and history" (p. xix). Merchant also lays out the long history of women and nature, and describes how the Scientific Revolution came to shape many of the views society holds on women and nature. Add to this Indigenous ways of seeing the world, the passing on of knowledge through oral history, where stories are passed down through generations, and it is easy to realize that learning through school is only one way of becoming educated. My mother learned much of her way of being in the world through oral tradition. The rest must have been her own insight. Reflecting back, my mother had an amazing way with insects and animals, and I do not remember her ever killing any. Some four or five years later, in England, I remember being very afraid of dogs when we would be out walking. Any barking dog that came up to us, my mother would simply and quietly talk to it as if it were a human being and the dog would just move out of the way and let us pass. It was amazing to witness, and to this day I cannot explain it. I remember thinking that maybe that was how dogs behaved with adults, but not children. Sadly, that way of being with animals and not being afraid is something I have yet to master as an adult, even though I never had that trouble as a child. Funny that!

2.2. Rocky Start

I was only five years old when I somehow realized that schooling and I were not going to get along. This realization came when I saw the teacher, our teacher to all of us sitting outside on the bare dusty floor in long rows⁵, lead a student out to the front of the class and do something no one anticipated: slapped the young boy on the cheek. The

⁵ Similar to the children seen sitting outside in the documentary film *Schooling the World* by Carol Black (2010) or in photographs depicted in the charity work of *Ekal Vidyalaya* as seen at <https://www.ekal.org>

realization that this school 'stuff' was not for me came instantly when the teacher hit that child. I heard and felt that slap from many feet away. It was exactly at that point I made the decision that being in a place where this could happen to me was not the greatest idea my parents ever had. So, I quit. That was day two of pre-school.

Yes, at the tender age of five, and without the aid of any advisors, I made what I believe was a sensible decision. I never confided in anyone, but I knew I was not going to be in that class or rather the 'open outdoor space' called school, where the children sat on the floor in long perpendicular rows to the teacher. It was not just the fact that I witnessed a fellow child being hit and did not understand that action. It was also that I could not make sense of why we were made to sit in rows on the floor with instructions to be quiet and not talk. We did not have chairs in which we would "be praised for sitting attentively" (Snowber 2011, p.191), but the expectation was the same. I was, of course, not aware at the time that this was "the first mistake of schooling - equating mindfulness, alertness, with not only stillness, but also frozenness" (pp.191-192). I had no idea of such equations at the time, but just sitting there silently did feel alien to me and that was enough to justify my decision. Plus, I could hardly hear the teacher and my thoughts were busy wandering elsewhere, so it all made no sense to me. Maybe I learnt more from that teacher without either of us realizing, because as Hirst (1971) argued, "Pupils may learn many things when a teacher is not in fact teaching."⁶ Or maybe I was that child who must have known "the body does not lie but is the place where truth lives" (Snowber 2011, p.190). I must have instinctively known to trust my body at that time, as it is the body "you can trust when you need to listen to your inner voice" (p.188). That same inner voice was telling me to get the hell out of there and leave the sitting silently in rows to others, be it willingly or by compulsion.

The only problem was, how on earth was I going to pull it off, because come the third day I was going to be sent to school and any amount of protest would not fly, especially as I was to walk to school with my sister, two years older than me. I knew I could not protest. It would be in vain. Why? Well, most sensible parents do what society expects of them and send their off-spring to school. In my case, there were solid reasons for this. Firstly, my parents wanted both their children to be educated, since they were not educated, having not had the opportunity to go to school. My father was no different

⁶ Retrieved from; https://www.azquotes.com/author/31693-Paul_Q_Hirst

to Kuoch's (2013) father, who "never received a formal education" but "desperately carved one for his children" (p.54). Secondly, because society thinks it is a good idea; and thirdly, in most advanced countries, it is the law. My father knew that.

Still, I was only five-years-old and knew better. It is true! So, the next day, the third day of the start of my so-called education, I did not tell a soul of the decision I had made the previous morning. Nor did I speak to a single person of how my decision was going to be implemented, mainly because I did not know it myself. So that third morning and as per my newly formed morning routine, I was made ready and dressed for school and chaperoned by my sister for the journey that was approximately between half and one mile into the next village. As per the two previous mornings, we were met by a few others from our village who attended the same 'outdoor space' called the school. It was a collective parents' idea that this group of children should walk together to school, a good plan if everyone's intentions were the same. However, mine had radically shifted two days in. With no particularly carefully thought out plan, I walked with my sister, who had the responsibility of looking after her little brother, until we met the others and the four or five of us proceeded towards that place where a strange adult had the authority to hit a child of five-years old.

The question that remained was how was I going to execute my very serious decision taken about 20 hours prior? We were almost halfway to the dreaded school and I was without a shrewd plan or a vanishing act. In a matter of minutes, I would have to walk through the entrance and once there, there would be no escape. Thinking back, that would have been exactly the right time to ask the question, "What exactly is education?" Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Now, if I had crossed that dreaded entrance, that would have been a good question to ask the teacher. Who knows, he may have had an answer of some kind, even a good answer. Some kind of answer may have done both of us some good, in the sense that I may have embraced his classes or the school. It may have made my schooling straight forward, where my learning did not have to take so long. I doubt it though. My thought was he would more likely test the speed of his right hand against my face. Each step I took made me closer to the place I had already quit in my mind, so why was I walking towards it when I had no intention of going there? Maybe I should have come clean with my parents and told them of my decision. After all, it was based on some reasonable assumptions. Only I was not able to articulate what those reasonable assumptions were; I had yet to reach proper school age.

I had no idea what to do. All the others from our little group appeared to be quite content and were busy talking amongst themselves as we edged closer to the destination - their destination, not mine. All I knew was that I was going to run out of steps sooner or later. I remember lagging behind a tiny bit not knowing what to do. Then, it happened. Out of the blue and without any warning, insight or planning, I quietly and stealthily 'slipped' away from my fellow preschoolers and entered into a cornfield to the left that stood tall right next to the path, by the side of the dirt road that we had walked along to get to school. I had no idea what I was doing, and the strange thing is, the rest of the group did not even seem to notice. They were busy doing that walk and talk thing so early in life that they would surely perfect much later. As for me, I did not worry about that just yet. A cornfield seemed a better option than the remainder of the journey, the school or that teacher. I did not know the difference: school or teacher, seemed the same thing to me. Oh, how true that proved to be many years later!

Yes, that cornfield, I remember to this day, was far more inviting. But what was I to do with this very welcoming piece of nature's wonder? I had no idea. Least of my problems. I carefully walked through the limited space the farmers gave each stem that stood upright, reaching towards the sun's nurture. Once I got far enough away, approximately 50 feet, I stood surrounded and suffocatingly close to the stems and the large leaves protecting their crop that had yet to fully form. What on earth was I going to do here, in the middle of a field? Furthermore, how was I going to occupy myself for the whole time I was supposed to be in school? Not a problem, not even in the slightest. The reason for the non-concern is simple. Yet to be schoolers and five-year olds do not think like that. Such questions are asked by adults, those who have been schooled or reached maturity by other means. I remember looking around, tightly squeezed among the corn stalks; "what now?" never entered my head. In the absence of such question, I proceeded to flatten about four or five corn stems to make a small circle of a clearing where I could house myself comfortably. I knew I was far enough away from the road so that no passer-by would see me. Unknown to me, cornfields offer a perfect little hideaway. I plonked myself down in some relief that my journey of the third day had ended so swiftly. What also ended was the start of what should have been my formal education, for the time being at least. What now became a priority was how to best occupy myself for the duration of the school hours, another piece of the unplanned I had not factored in. Again, least of my problems. I remember sitting there in that cornfield

without a care in the world. I did not feel alone. I did not miss anyone, and I did not for a second think I had done anything wrong. All I had to figure out was what to do until the school hours were over.

It was clear to me that I did not want to be at school. What I did know, and there was no doubt about it, was that I would rather be alone in a small circular 'spot' in the middle of the cornfield than at that school. I also felt more comfortable being with the various creatures and bugs than with the teacher and my so called, yet to be become, classmates. So, what did I do for all those hours while my fellow 'classmates' were 'learning' who knows what in school? Well, I was busy watching the ants doing all the things that they were busy doing. I was also busy inspecting the corn plants that stood so high that I could barely see their tops, and all the bugs and birds that would come and go. I did not see it at the time as learning, but that is what I was doing by being with such creatures. I remember watching and being amazed how those small, tiny ants would be so organized in lines to carry things that were often twice or three times their own size; how they would carry their load down into holes in the ground, and then come back out again to do the same thing over and over. It was fascinating. I had no framework to help me understand that I was being pulled into a "moment of possibility" (Snowber 2011a, p.154). So many such moments, totally engrossing and fascinating. I remember being so curious and asking myself all sorts of questions such as, "what are they doing? Where are they going? Where are they coming from? Do they speak to each other? How do they know what to do? Who or what is telling them to do what they are doing," and so on? I would see a bird land on a corn stem so gently, stay there for a short while and take off without causing any damage. Little did I know at the time that I was totally immersed in David Abram's (1977) territory and fully absorbed in my natural surroundings and at one with nature, seeing and sensing the wonder of the living world, being fully present and oblivious of "linear time" (p.202). Here I was, witnessing "the intelligence that lurks in nonhuman nature" (p.19). It almost felt that the time of the whole school day just flew by and before I knew, it was time to leave my little creature friends and rejoin the children on their way back home after their time at school. My "invitation into another kind of time, a timelessness within time" (Snowber 2011a, p.154) was over and I had to head back to my 'normal' reality until the next day. When I heard the voice of who I thought were my 'walking party,' I quickly left my little spot and walked out onto the road to quietly rejoin the group, lagging slightly behind as we headed back home.

The strange thing was that not one of them said anything about me not being with them at school. Not even my sister, bless her.

Nothing in the children's conversation about what they had done or learned was exciting enough for me to give up my 'spot' in the cornfield and go to school the next day or the day after that, or indeed the rest of the days that followed, a good couple of weeks before I was 'found out.' Thankfully, my parents made the decision that pre-school was wasted on me, in India at least. That was shortly before I was transported to England to be educated, presumably for a better life. That was in 1965. Little did I know at the time that Gill's (2012) statement, "From the golden domes of Delhi, our plane flies into the silvery sky and I am home away from home always searching for my home" (p.317) would so aptly apply to me. I too have been searching for my home ever since, in education and beyond.

2.3. Becoming

Leicester, a town one hundred miles north of London and the Roman center of England, became my new hometown. It was there that I was put into the last stage (a few months) of a pre-elementary school. I remember being escorted, hand held tight, to the pre-school and being left there. This time there were no cornfields to run to, nor did I have the inclination to do so. Why? Because it was a completely unfamiliar environment and looked nothing like the pre-school I ran away from. There were no children sitting on the floor in long rows forced into being quiet. Here, in this new pre-school, children were playing with toys. Toys! Toys like I had never seen before. These children were busy talking with each other in small groups or pairs and more importantly, they were playing and exploring the toys. Maybe Albert Einstein was right when he famously said, "Play is the highest form of research." A few of the children welcomed me and let me play with them despite not being able to speak a word of each other's language. Children, generally, are like that. They have yet to learn of prejudice and they have yet to acquire it from school and society. Lynch's circular diagram illustrates all the places where prejudice is acquired from the moment a child is born and through life, in what he calls "The dynamic process of prejudice acquisition" (1987, p.39). He suggests that prejudice is acquired from many sources that are often interlinked, starting with the immediate groups such as 'parents,' 'extended family,' 'peers,' and spreading out wider as the child grows. These include 'customs,' 'tradition,' 'religious beliefs,' 'culture' at large, and

moving to the broader 'structure of society' and 'environmental factors' (p.39).

Thankfully, it is not something that humans are born with, if my early experience of inclusion is any evidence. Lynch challenges us adults, suggesting that we have to unlearn most of what we have been taught in order to understand our own bias. He maintains this to be the real challenge for schools and education. I remember that first day because I felt welcomed, included and even though I did not speak a word of English, I still managed to play with some of the other children for all the time I was there. Even though I learnt a few of the rules of being in a proper pre-school, there was no need to run to the cornfield. Little did I know then that this was how I was lured into my 'formal' education.

A few months later, I was moved to Medway Junior School for the start of my elementary education. This was followed by the progression to an ordinary secondary school, where I would spend the next five years, before leaving at the grand age of sixteen. I say 'ordinary secondary school' because I failed to pass the so called 'Eleven-plus'⁷ exam, the importance of which I failed to understand at the time, as did my parents. I later learned that Grammar schools were for the clever kids, who would be expected to go on to stay in school until the age of eighteen and complete 'A level' study (Advanced level). 'A levels' were the gold standard, required for admission to university, to go on and complete a degree. The university choice was largely determined by the grade with which you passed your 'A level' subjects. Generally, two to three subjects with grades of A to C was the norm. Robinson (2009) differentiates these two schools in the following manner:

The grammar schools offered a more prestigious, academic education, and they were the primary routes to professional careers and universities. Secondary modern schools offered a more practical education for kids to take up manual and blue-collar jobs. (...)The whole system was a deliberate piece of social engineering designed to provide the workforce for the industrial economy in the UK.

(p.171).

⁷ "The eleven-plus was a series of IQ tests develop to identify the academic aptitudes needed for a grammar school education. Passing the eleven-plus was, for working class kids, the best path to a professional career and an escape from a possible lifetime of manual work" (Robinson 2009, p.171-2).

By the time I left my 'junior school' I could barely write a meaningful paragraph in English, so 'Grammar school' was not a real option.

I was scheduled to go to Moat Boys' School, a mile down the road, a school filled with characters just like me. Unbeknownst to me, my father had a cunning plan. His goal was to make sure I went to a better school than I was designated. He had no means with which he could consult with the local Education Authority to try and move me to a better school. He was an immigrant who he did not speak English and had no idea how to navigate the educational system to improve his son's chances of success. So, he went out during the summer break and house hunted until he ended up in a house in Evington Village. As a result, I ended up going to the mixed Secondary Modern School in the suburbs, on other side of the city. That 'modern school' was where the girls entered through the left side of the building through a door with 'Girls Entrance' sign stamped above in concrete, and boys entered through the other end of the building, several hundred feet away, through the 'Boys Entrance.' The rest is history as they say, at least for the time being. Despite my fathers' efforts, I completed my formal schooling and promptly left at the age of sixteen with no qualifications. That 'deliberate piece of social engineering' had done its job and I had no choice but to head out to the world of manual blue-collar work. My father's plan fell well short of achieving what he had desired. He had thought that the school would do its job after he had done his. He saw no reason for him to be involved in my actual schooling because he was like so many parents who were made to feel, as Hibbitts (2009) describes, that they "did not have to be involved in their child's schooling because education had been delegated to the schools. Teachers were professionals; teaching was therefore not the job of parents" (p.6). My failure to gain any qualifications may well had been a collective failure involving my father, myself and the school, but that is not how my father saw it.

My father's reaction to me leaving school without any prospects of higher education or a decent job was one of sheer disappointment and despair. Like Kouch's (2013) father, he wanted "not just basic education" for his son, but "rather he dreamed of an education that he believed only a Western World could offer" (p.54). The sacrifices he made were the same as those so many immigrant parents make, only his resulted in disappointment. My parents, like Bai's (2012), "grew up without electricity or car or telephone," and had yet to experience "modernization and westernization" (p.30), in their country of origin. Despite this, they still managed to instill in me with a similar value that

Bai received from her Korean parents, “that schooling is the only means to ensure my social and economic survival and leading a decent life.” This “was not a deceptive message” (p. 74), and I was not the only one receiving such advice. This was the reality for many immigrant parents and their children. Kuoch (2013) remembers his father saying to him “Son, I use my hands so you can use your head” (p.54), and Hiro (1992) recalls the advice of many fathers to their South Asian sons that, “Without education you’ll be nothing” (p.151). After a decade of such good advice, here I was at sixteen without that ‘education’ and destined to be that ‘nothing.’ Little did I know that part of that advice had seeped into my bones, firmly becoming part of my “body memory” (Smith 1991, p.160), laying there waiting to be awoken in a time to come (Snowber 2016, Smith 1992). Following the end of school and two weeks of unemployment, I was persuaded by my father and a friend of his to volunteer working and helping out at a small two-men operated garage in town, where I had to commute by bicycle, my only means of affordable transport. My father’s hope was that I would learn the hard way. That I did, as I worked Monday to Friday, 8.30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. for free. When I felt like quitting, I was gently but firmly persuaded by my father to continue to work hard, and eventually ask the owner to allow me to attend college one day a week for a City and Guilds 396 Motor Vehicle Engineering Course.

That was the start of my part-time college attendance, which paved the way to my first set of qualifications, in the vocational education. At the end of the first year, I was upgraded and transferred to the CGLI Motor Vehicle Technicians Course, a four-year course of higher level of study. My first year I was learning things I should have learned in school, and thorough considerable hard work, it started to pay off. After four years, I was awarded The Wiber Award for being the best overall technician in all of Leicester. That award was presented to me at the end of year ceremony in December 1980 by the Leicester City Football Club manager Jock Wallace and the photograph of that presentation appeared in The Leicester Mercury, the main newspaper in the city. It was my first real achievement, a belated pay off for my father’s sacrifices. Most importantly, it encouraged curiosity – my curiosity – about my potential to learn. Suddenly, this was not enough!

More had to be done and achieved. This was confirmed to me in the weirdest of visions. I was cycling to my work along my everyday route on Evington Lane, by the golf club, where on a clear day you could see the Leicester University’s tallest building tower

from about 3 miles away. I saw this regularly on the horizon, a part of the daily scenery. Then, one day, I had a strange feeling that made me pull into the curb (sidewalk) and come to a full stop. Standing on the roadside, I just froze and kept looking at that university tower. My eyes took in the all too familiar sight as if I was seeing it for the first time, as my mind wondered if I could be good enough to go there one day. There was a pause, a silence followed. Then came a tiny voice from within that only I was privy to, that quietly whispered: “Yes, of course you can, if you work hard enough.” Was this what Socrates meant when he said, “When the mind is thinking, it is talking to itself?” Or was it the case of “thought cannot exist without signs,” as the Postman (1995, p.188)? recalled. Whatever it was, it reverberated off that value my father had worked so hard to instill in me, stirring the desire to become ‘something’ more. Regardless of what it was, it had achieved its purpose and my mission to get to university and become a teacher was cast in stone that day. I got back on my bicycle and for the rest of the journey to work envisioned a future where I would earn a living ‘working with my head rather than my hands.’

2.4. Lesson in the West

A year before I became the ‘best technician in town’ so to speak, I received what felt like my first real lesson in education, from a most unusual source: popular music. Ten years of formal full-time schooling and four years of part-time vocational education failed to deliver such a lesson, where I was made to pay attention and focus like I had never done before. I enjoyed ‘pop music’ like most people enjoy it, but I never considered the possibility that it would connect to me and my world. At the time, nothing truly seemed to connect to my life as I straddled in two worlds: a third world immigrant family home and the experience of life in mainstream Britain. In 1979, the pop/rock group Supertramp released a song called “The Logical Song” (Hodgson 1979), and for the first time in my life, it felt like they were singing mostly about my life. The first verse was my experience in a nutshell, as Roger Hodgson opens with:

When I was young, it seemed that life was so wonderful,
a miracle, oh, it was beautiful, magical
And all the birds in the trees, well they'd be singing so happily,
joyfully, playfully watching me
But then they sent me away to teach me how to be sensible,
logical, responsible, practical

That verse seemed like me all over. Then came the hard part of the song, which took me a long time to unpack sufficiently in order to understand. In fact, it is only recently that I revisited this song to explore lines such as “And they showed me a world where I could be so dependable, clinical, intellectual, cynical.” Such is the experience of the examined life and its layers of understanding.

The second verse asked the most pertinent and, for me, the hardest question of all, which I did not fully understand because I had yet to see song as a pedagogical tool to appreciate how it could be so relevant to my learning and to education. Hodgson (1979) sang:

There are times when all the world's asleep,
The questions run too deep
for such a simple man
Won't you please, please tell me what we've learned
I know it sounds absurd
but please tell me who I am?

The question “who I am?” is probably the most important question that every human being should ask sometime in their life. It would be even better if every student during their formal schooling was encouraged to address this question and at the very least think about it, not necessarily to find the answer, but just think about it. I know I would have been extremely grateful if any one of my many teachers had directed it at me like Dobson (2012) does her the opening sentence “Who are you?” (p. 252). How can we be anything until and unless we know who we are? Yet, that is exactly what I did not explore to understand, even when I became a professional. It was certainly not a question I had to address in my teacher training, nor did I address it throughout my entire professional career as an educator. Parker Palmer (2007) reminds us that we cannot be effective teachers if we are not our authentic selves. He contends, “knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject” (p.3). Parker’s most famous, bold and often quoted phrase “We Teach Who We Are” (Parker 2007, p.1,) whilst being true, is often in reality, practiced more in reverse. Cohen & Bai (2012) make it clear: “We teach who we are not, and that’s the problem.” (p.263). I have to agree, as I was that teacher in my professional life that Cohen and Bai speak of. It is

very difficult to be authentic when one does not know who they are. Oh, how I wish I had such wisdom to guide me all those years ago.

In a recent interview, Roger Hodgson gives his reasoning for The Logical Song;

The song was born out of my questions about what really mattered in life. Throughout childhood we're taught how to behave, yet we're very rarely told anything about the deeper purpose of life. We go from the innocence and wonder of childhood to the confusion of adolescence, and that often ends up in disillusionment in adulthood. And many of us spend our lives trying to get back to that innocence.

(Hodgson 2016)

Elliot (2016) contextualises it, pointing out the “damning critique of the education system” delivered through the song. In an interview with Dan MacIntosh, Hodgson explains how his own experience of schooling inspired the lyrics that resonated so readily for me:

It's very basically saying that what they teach us in schools is all very fine, but what about what they don't teach us in schools that creates so much confusion in our being. I mean, they don't really prepare us for life in terms of teaching us who we are on the inside. They teach us how to function on the outside and to be very intellectual, but they don't tell us how to act with our intuition or our heart or really give us a real plausible explanation of what life's about. There's a huge hole in the education. I remember leaving school at 19, I was totally confused. That song really came out of my confusion, which came down to a basic question: please tell me who I am. I felt very lost.

(Hodgson 2012)

I did not address the question until halfway through this PhD study. It never arose during my entire education up to this point. It reinforces the image of the educated person who fails to understand the self, which in turn raises the question of what it means to be educated, or as I put it earlier, ‘What is an educated person?’

2.5. Another Lesson

Hard on the heels of the ‘Logical Song,’ Pink Floyd released ‘Another Brick in the Wall,’ written by Roger Waters. Both these songs contained far more education than I realized at the time. The strange coincidence was that both songs were released in 1979, the same year that the term “postmodernism” first entered the philosophical

lexicon, with the publication of *The Postmodern Condition* by Jean-François Lyotard⁸. While Lyotard created quite a stir in the academic circles with his publication, Waters created a stir by quietly hurling just 48 words into what Taylor (2005) would call the 'public sphere,' which in turn generated an interesting phenomenon that took a life of its own. Both these occurrences took place at a time when Post-modernism was still in its infancy and Britain was just recovering from the shockwaves of the Punk movement that had rocked the establishment. Those 48 words created a small sense of moral panic and pushed education and its delivery for a short while into the spotlight of the post-modern order.

'Another Brick in the Wall' was released as a single two weeks before the release of the album called 'The Wall' on November 30, 1979 and reached number one on the U.K. singles chart, where it stayed over the much-coveted Christmas period, and well into the new year. The song also went to number one on the U.S. Billboard chart. That success was followed by the album reaching number 1 in 10 countries, ranging from the U.S. to Australia. How that one song came about is well documented (Jones 1999, Blake, 2008, Fielder 2013). The 48 words that made up the only verse of the song, as well as the chorus, marked a departure from the usual 'pop song' formula of verse(s) followed by a chorus. More importantly, it became the voice of many children and adults across the world:

We don't need no education
We don't need no thought control
No dark sarcasm in the classroom
Teachers leave the kids alone
Hey teacher, leave us kids alone
All in all it's just another brick in the wall
All in all you're just another brick in the wall

(Waters 1979)

⁸ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005/2015, p. 1)

That was it, the whole song. It is worth exploring here, albeit briefly, the origins of these 48 words and examine why they had such an impact and why they continue to resonate even today with so many individuals, including the world of educational academics.⁹

The video that accompanied the song 'Another Brick in the Wall' with its opening frames of the then modern city of London, symbolizing modernity in all its glory, makes clear how modern schooling damages children. A parallel can easily be seen with elements of William Doll (1993) and Bowls and Gintis's (1976) work, who illustrate in text what Waters (1979), Scarfe¹⁰ and Parker¹¹ demonstrate using music, art and the medium of film. What Waters, Scarfe and Parker managed to do so well was to visually represent the process and effects of schooling in the modern order. The metaphor of the 'brick in the wall' represents a central tenet of modernity: the need for control. The bricks have to be manufactured and be perfect, uniform in shape, size and representation to be able to fit into and create the perfect wall. In order for this to happen, there has to be a process in place to produce the bricks, and then use them systematically to build that perfect wall. What Waters is saying with his 48 words and music and Scarfe with his artwork of cartoons and Parker with his direction of film scenes, is that schooling is the process that produces the bricks and assists the construction of the wall; only here, the bricks are students and the wall is the modern society. Waters believed that the modern schooling process discouraged 'independent thought and imagination and churn out individuals who think the same' (Jones, 1999, p.125). The charge against the industrial model of schooling therefore, is that they do more to destroy children's prospects than enhance them, by trying to 'convert' all into being the same, a theme that Sir Ken Robinson has consistently referred to over the past 13 years in his TED Talks on education and creativity as well as in his book 'The Element' (Robinson 2009).

This is also dramatically portrayed by the director Alan Parker in the motion picture 'Pink Floyd The Wall' (Marshall & Parker 1982). Parker uses the film scenes to

⁹ See Dr Ozlem Sensoy's 2008 graduate Course Outline for Educ 710-5 Special Topics: Sociology and Education in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University, where all the words of "Another Brick in the Wall" are featured on the front page.

¹⁰ Gerald Scarfe was the political cartoonist for The Times of London, hired for the creation of all the artwork of cartoons and graphics featured in the video that accompanied the song, the album sleeve of 'The Wall' and the motion picture 'Pink Floyd The Wall.'

¹¹ Alan Parker, award-winning director, was hired to direct the motion picture, 'Pink Floyd The Wall,' (Marshall 1982) released by Metro Goldwyn Mayer and United Artists in 1982.

represent schooling and modernity with its obsession for control, conformity, discipline, mechanization, compartmentalization of classrooms (therefore knowledge) in school buildings, students marching in line and eventually dropping into a meat grinder and being churned out as a uniform meat to be molded into shape. Parker leaves no room for doubt here¹² as he demonstrates the industrialized process of schooling and illustrates the role of science by representing classrooms as mazes and compartments, where uniformed children conform to orders, marching in unison, all looking the same with pig-like face masks. This issue of conformity is still very much a part of schooling today, as Egan (1997) confirms: “The very structure of modern schools in the West, with its age cohorts, class groupings, team sports and so on, encourages conformity to modern social norms” (p.11). The same ‘factorization,’ advocated by Ellwood Cubberly, U.S Commissioner of Education and Mayer Rice (Doll, pp. 42-47) was “brought into the public schools by the US Steel Company when it established the model city of Gary, Indiana” (Doll, p.43). Cubberly, as the Dean of Stanford University’s School of Education stated: “Our schools are, in a sense, factories, in which the raw materials – children- are to be shaped and fashioned into products” (Black 2010). Doll (1993) uses the exact statement from Cubberly, but after ‘products’ adds “to meet the various demands of life” (p. 47), clarifying why ‘children have to be shaped and fashioned.’ This process is clear for all to see in the film scene accompanying the song ‘Another Brick in the Wall.’

It is this process of conformity and uniformity that comes under heavy scrutiny from Waters’s own personal experience of schooling at Cambridge High School and then later whilst studying architecture in London, England. His serious questioning of the teaching methods deployed during his education ultimately resulted in the now famous song of 48 words. The song itself is consistently misinterpreted, much to the annoyance of its author, who insists that it is ‘not an anti-education rap’:

¹² This scene accompanies the song ‘Another Brick in the Wall’ in the motion picture Pink Floyd The Wall (Marshall & Waters 1982), and not the music video where cartoons are used instead. The full scene segment can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YR5ApYxkU-U> where it opens with a terrified schoolboy imagining what schooling is doing to him and then his experiences of ridicule by his teacher as well as scenes of routine teaching and disciplining that have thankfully changed over the years. However, some aspects that Parker dramatizes are still prevalent in some classrooms, even though regarded as bad practice (i.e. the issue of ridicule).

Instead, it seeks to convey the message that vindictive and bitter teachers, and factory schooling, can break a child for life. The effect on such children is one of demoralizing them to the point where they repress their innate creativity.

(Jones 1999, p.125)

Ken Robinson (2006) eloquently makes the same point nearly 30 years later in a TED talk, saying: 'We are educating people out of their creativity.'" Similar observations of schools destroying children's creativity were put forth by Holt (1965) in what he termed the 'process that we misname education' (p.165).

Waters's 48 words resulted in what could be viewed as the perfect intersection where education, art, music and the Post Modern met and called for the end of the modern schooling system. Did Western society really need art and music to highlight this failure in the public arena, a failure that many in the educational world have been highlighting for decades and even centuries? Bowls and Gintis (1976) put it this way:

Two centuries ago, the structure and scope of American education bore little resemblance to our current school system. Along the way, many and diverse alternatives were considered and tried.... education has reached and passed many crossroads.

(p. 152)

One could say the same for the U.K. and the Canadian education systems, too. However, what has happened over the years is not the complete revolt that students display in final scenes of Parker's depiction, where they tear down the walls and burn the desks and the school buildings while dishing out some ridicule of their own on their teacher. Instead, "The apparently smooth functioning conveyor belt which carries young people from birth to adult work – the family, school, workplace machine - has faltered and then been readjusted in the past" (Bowls and Gintis 1976, p. 152), creating the system we have today.

So, what exactly was it about these particular 48 words that resonated with so many? Was it just because art and music stimulate the human senses and touch the 'soul' like nothing else or was it indeed that "Art makes the invisible, visible" (Johnson 2002, p. 52)? It surely was what it took for the likes of me to see what schools were really doing, failing most of their students, students like me. Incidentally, it is exactly this experience of the industrial model of education that so many around the world have

been subjected to that explains why so many individuals resonated so easily with Waters's lyrics. Jones (1999) explains: "The song's 'controversial theme became a rallying cry, it became a universal anthem. In South Africa, the song was taken up by school boycotters, causing a national ban on its sales or broadcast" (p. 176). A government taking the action to ban is a testament to the power of this song. As I later discovered, like '*The Logical Song*,' '*Another Brick in the Wall*' was being discussed in many educative circles. However, I had yet to discover the powerful role popular music was to play in my life.

In 1979, popular music for me was just for entertainment, pretty much as it is for most today, in line with some of Adorno's critique of popular music detailed in his 1938 essay *On the fetish character in music and the regression of listening* (1991 pp. 29-60). Even though much of what Adorno said was before there was any form of Rock or Pop Music as we now know it, his observation that "people have learned to deny their attention to what they are hearing even while listening to it" (p. 30) still holds true. Also true is Adorno's notion of "Deconcentration," where he argues "listeners are no longer capable of concentrated listening" (p. 49). This does not apply to every listener, but does apply to most listeners of the 'mass-produced' popular music of today. The art of deep listening is certainly something that has become a lost art (Snowber 2005; Gershon 2017). Part of the reason for this is life in the modern world, as Snowber reminds us: "As human beings in a fast-paced culture, we are not necessarily trained in the art of deep or attentive listening" (2005, p.347). Not only do we often fail to hear the sounds that surround us (Abram 1997; Gershon 2017), but also when we are actually listening to music by choice. Most of us certainly do not practice 'deep listening' as defined by Pauline Oliveros:

"Deep Listening is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds"

(Gershon 2017, p. 196).

The propensity to not listen deeply or carefully certainly applied to me back then. The power of popular music had yet to cut through my limited rational and intellectual development and challenge notions internalised from education I had received up to that point. I had yet to understand the basics of another well-known Einstein statement,

“Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school.” To fully understand this statement would take another 34 years.

Chapter 3. Art, Music and Enlightenment

3.1. Art

An enormous amount has been written about the arts in relation to education. It is not my intention to revisit such territory, but I do wish to touch the tip of the arts iceberg and provide some insight as to why the arts, and especially music, have been so instrumental in my learning. There is something special about the arts, something that often defies explanation. Dewey (2005) wrote about this at length. Arts allow us to see things in a manner that other means cannot. Maybe this is because “Art can grab people’s attention in powerful ways” (Leavy 2009, p.12). For myself, that is not in doubt, as so much of my learning came to me from the arts. I share Howard Zinn’s (2006) experience: “It was people in the arts who perhaps had the greatest emotional effect on me” (p. 65). None of my experiences in school, college or university had the same effect as some of the arts have. I readily relate to Maxine Greene’s recognition that “the arts provide new perspectives on the lived world” (p. 4). The reason why arts can do this is perhaps summed best by Zinn when he states:

It always seemed to me that there was a special power that artists had when they commented, either in their own work or outside their work, on what was going on in the world. There was a kind of force that they brought into the discussion that mere prose could not match. Part of it had to do with a passion and an emotion which comes within poetry, which comes with music, that comes with drama, which is rarely equaled in prose, even if it is beautiful prose.

(p. 65)

Maybe this is because “All art can potentially bring things into question” (Richmond 2009, p.117) and thereby provide a “way of understanding reality” (p.145), a reality that general education through schooling does not adequately address. Part of the reason this is possible is because “Art teaches us to be more observant and critical of what is around us in the material and social worlds” (Richmond 2009a, p.138); it does this through its ability to “communicate powerful social statements” (p.134). Patricia Leavy adds that “The arts, at their best, are known for being emotionally and politically evocative, captivating, aesthetically powerful, and moving (2009, p.12). These sentiments completely capture why the arts have spoken to me in such a direct and effective manner. Howard Zinn (2006) compares the power of art with that of school

classes, highlighting how a work of art can be far more effective than the typical processes of education we have become so accustomed to:

I've always believed that a work of art can bring a point home better than any prosaic exposition. I could give ten lectures about war and give them in such a way as to express my passionate feelings against war, and they would not have the impact that student reading *Johnny Got His Gun* for one evening would feel.

(p. 81)

Zinn could well be right, if my experience provides sufficient confirmation. As for the impact of *Johnny Got His Gun* by Dalton Trumbo (1970) compared to my learning of history in school, there is no question. For example, I remember the year 1066 for the Battle of Hastings, when King Harold was hit with an arrow in his eye. It felt like a story of almost cartoonish nature. *Johnny Got his Gun* is harrowing and feels deeply personal. Reading it made me question so much, ranging from what war does and the impact it has on individuals and their families, to questioning notions such as democracy, nobility and more. It is one of the most powerful works on war and its effects. And I have to agree that not even 'ten lectures' from the great maestro would have had the same impact.

It is no coincidence that Cindy Sheehan (2005), the woman who inadvertently became the face of protest against the Iraq war in 2004, setting camp outside President George W. Bush's Texas ranch, provided a Forward to the latest edition of *Jonny Got His Gun*. The book had a profound effect on her, reading it after losing her son to the Iraq war. Sheehan's protest was for a very simple cause: she wanted one simple question to be answered by President Bush. She wanted to know, for what noble cause did her son die? A simple enough question that no one in the U.S. government was able to answer truthfully, least of all the president, despite the common messaging that the U.S. was fighting a "noble cause" and that every death of a U.S. soldier was for a "noble cause." After many failed efforts through official channels, she resorted to protest. The answer that 'there was no noble cause' could not be given. Trumbo makes it clear in *Johnny Got His Gun* that "There's nothing noble about dying" (p.118). He challenges his audience to reflect:

What's noble about lying in the ground and rotting? What's noble about never seeing sunshine again? What's noble about having your arms and legs blown off? What's noble about being an idiot? What's noble about being blind and deaf and dumb? What's noble about being dead?

(p.119)

He views a military death in battle as pointless: "Because when you are dead mister it's all over. It's the end' (p.119). Trumbo reminds us that no parent ever wants to hear of their child who willingly sacrificed or were made to sacrifice their life for country, or a 'noble cause.' He points out that in death:

You're less than a dog less than a rat, less than a bee or an ant less than a white maggot crawling on a dungheap. You're dead mister and you died for nothing.

You're dead mister.

Dead.

(p.119)

The point could not be made more vehemently. Cindy Sheehan says that *Jonny Got His Gun* is one of two books "that every American should read" (in Foreword, Trumbo 1970 reprint), the other being General Smedley Butler's equally intense and informative work *War Is a Racket*. She would know. She had to wrestle in torment with these issues and read and digest such powerful statements. No amount of formal schooling could have prepare me for what mothers like Cindy Sheehan went through. This is an example of where a work of art provides answers where other modes fail.

The argument that a work of art can be more powerful than most lessons in class has been made time and time again. Maxine Greene (1995) has consistently espoused the value of art as a means of learning. She uses Marcuse's claim that art "breaks open a dimension inaccessible to other experience, a dimension in which human beings, nature, and things no longer stand under the law of the established reality principle" (Greene 1995, p. 138-139). She observes that when people allow themselves to be immersed in the "languages and images in works of art," (p. 139) they can see, hear and understand the world in a way they could not otherwise. Such 'images and languages' make "perceptible, visible, and audible that which is no longer, or not yet, perceived, said, and heard in everyday life" (p.139). This is the power of arts in a nutshell. I have found that certain works of art have the power to move and stir my being like nothing

else. Robinson explains that this is partly due to the fact that, “We are deeply curious living organisms. We have unfathomable capacities for reason, for critical judgement, for imagination, for creativity” (Robinson 2018). Whether or not we learn anything meaningful or of value in school does not diminish the fact that we humans are highly inquisitive beings. Nothing illustrates this more than children. You only have to watch a child in their natural state and how they explore everything within reach and sight. As Robinson (2013) states, “arts aren’t just important because they improve math scores, they’re important because they speak to parts of children’s being which are otherwise untouched.” It is precisely this business of reaching areas that “otherwise” remain “untouched” that give works of art such power. Neil Postman(1995) highlights the importance of teaching art:

Art, it has been said, is the language of the heart, and if we teach about music, painting, architecture, and literature in schools, we ought to be doing it to help our youth understand that language so that it may penetrate their hearts.

(p. 162)

Fleming (2012) maintains that the arts “enrich our understanding of the world, challenge prevailing ideologies, widen our perspectives, engage and delight us, and celebrate our humanity” (p.1). I would add that art, in addition to delighting us, can and often does also shock us into reality. As Greene points out, “It is not uncommon for the arts to leave us somehow ill at ease or to prod us beyond acquiescence” (1995, p. 135). That is certainly what happened to me with songs, photographs, films and other works of art, as this work will demonstrate. Particularly important for me has been the ability to understand experience, and here arts played a significant role. Richmond (2005) suggests that “Art is a way of understanding experience, ourselves and others”(p. 87). Art becomes a way of knowing, or as Allen (1995) puts it, “a way of knowing what it is we actually believe” (p.5).

Maxine Greene (1995) perhaps best sums up all that art can do for us if we only let it: “Art offers life; it offers hope; it offers the prospect of discovery; it offers light” (p. 133). Maybe that is the same light that Canadian popular artist, poet and singer Leonard Cohen refers to when he sings “there is a crack in everything, that’s where the light gets in” (Cohen, 1992). This lyric is used by the educator Ted Aoki, who proposes to ‘crack open’ curriculum to let the ‘light in,’ opening up alternative ways of exploring the

curriculum (2005, p. 425). This is how a work of art, a song, can help even the wisest of “pedagogues” see differently (Pinar in Pinar & Irwin 2005, p. xv).

3.2. Music

I would teach children music, physics, and philosophy; but most importantly music, for the patterns in music and all the arts are the keys to learning.

(Plato)¹³

There are real things in music - real emotions, real joy, real passion, hope-that I know are out there.

(Bruce Springsteen 2000)¹⁴

My life was changed in an instant by something that people thought was purely junk – pop music records. And you can change someone’s life in three minutes with the right song. I still believe that to this day.

(Bruce Springsteen 2016a)

Although centuries apart in time and miles apart in their thinking, one thing both Plato and Springsteen would agree on is that music is important to learning. Plato’s insistence of the importance of music for the young has been one of the main reasons and justifications for the inclusion of music as part of curriculum for centuries. However, what Plato had in mind is very different from the music that Springsteen creates.

The use of popular music in education is nothing new. Postman and Weingartner (1969) open their book *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* with the lyrics of the Tom Paxton song “What did you learn in school today?” Donald Macedo, the education professor from the University of Massachusetts, uses the same Tom Paxton song lyrics in the introduction to Noam Chomsky’s (2000) book *Chomsky on Miseducation*. Many educators, such as Dimitriades (2001), Varty (2017), use popular music, especially hip hop to engage disenfranchised young black youth. Kajitani (2013) uses popular music, again hip hop, as means of teaching math effectively. Kuoch (2013) reveals how he

¹³ Retrieved from; <http://www.uky.edu/~eushe2/quotations/plato.html>. For a detailed review of the importance Plato places on music see Jowett, B (1973). *Plato: The Republic and other works*. New York: Anchor Books.

¹⁴ In Duffy (2000)

eventually managed to use hip hop in his classroom after gaining confidence to include it as a legitimate pedagogy. Karen Snell (2007) maintains that “Popular music can provide a platform for exploring political and social issues that are relevant to young people” (p. 50). Stevens & Fogel (2007) demonstrate how popular music can be used to teach about the Great Depression. They share their observations:

The Great Depression is typically taught through history textbooks, but the **music** of this time allows students to **learn** about this era through different perspectives (...) No one style of **music** has been more intricately woven into the political culture of the times than the blues.

There is also a vast collection of material created by the Rock and Roll Forever Foundation and its subsidiary Teach.org. These organizations promote and support teachers to use the medium of popular music and sometimes documentary, to teach a whole array of subjects.

Despite a rich history and advances in its application, the use of popular music has yet to break into mainstream teaching. Dedicated teachers and educators are demonstrating that the use of popular music is very effective in engaging students, but this work is being done only at the fringes of the school curriculum. Nikleva (2009) points out that “Music is part of the soundtrack of our students’ lives, yet this vital world is not given much attention in the classroom” (p.4). Lucy Green argues that “Music is a part of everyday life, and must be understood as such” (2006, p.1). Leavy adds: “Music is able to connect people through emotional evocation that in certain contexts may transcend language, economic, and other social barriers” (2005, p.102). Despite this, educators are generally reluctant to use popular music as a pedagogical tool.

My schooling experience supports Nikleva’s observation. In all my years as a student from elementary to graduate study, I have never once attended a class where the teacher or professor used popular music as a pedagogical tool to enhance learning and to engage me in the learning process. Yet, educators have known for some time that “Popular music can be used as a powerful motivational tool, one that can grab students’ attention, maintain students’ interest, and increase students’ involvement in classroom procedures (Springer, Gregory, Gooding & Lori 2013). Springer et.al. are speaking of using popular music in the context of music teaching rather than using popular music as a pedagogical tool, but it applies, nonetheless. With this understanding, my approach to teaching shifted. If math can be effectively taught

through music, the opportunity for humanities is endless. Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." and his cover version of Edwin Star's "War" are just two examples of songs that I have used in teaching (Thindal 2014; 2017) to cover or a whole range of issues, such as war and its aftermath, critical thinking, political decision making, notions of patriotism, noble cause, government and foreign policy.

Music is one of the most powerful pedagogical tools at a teacher's disposal. The reasons for this are all too obvious, but need to be elaborated here. The singer Rita Coolidge (1998) sums up why music is so effective compared with traditional academic approaches to teaching. In the documentary *Singing Our Stories* (Henry 1998) she echoes Postman's sentiment: "I think that music is the voice of the heart and I think that people understand when they hear messages sung more than if they read it in a book." Anthony Storr (1997) concurs: "Many of us remember the words of songs and poems more accurately than we can remember prose" (p.21). Part of the reason for this is because "Music can help us access and shed light on parts of social experience that textual or visual forms may fail to capture" (Leavy 2009, p.106). Joan Borysenko (2012) highlights the power of song: "A song can awaken the soul. When we listen to music, we might get goose bumps, breathe more deeply, or feel a flood of emotions that brings us to tears. Old memories might surface" (p.ix). That has certainly happened to me on more than one occasion. Maybe that is because, as Bressler (2005) maintains, "Sound penetrates us, engaging us on a bodily level in fundamentally different ways than the visual" (p.177). Walter Gershon details the superiority of sound over the visual text: "Sounds are educational, (...) Yet, more often than not, it is the ocular, our vision, that metaphorically and literally guides educational experiences" (2017, p. vii). This is perhaps the reason why much of my schooling did not resonate with me, as almost all the teaching and learning was based on engaging the ocular through pictures, text and presentation, with sound a mere byproduct. Music gets inside our bodies and it stays there for an unquantifiable time. Schopenhauer (1996) maintains that "the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts" (p.257). Maybe Schopenhauer is right and that is one reason why music connected with me, or perhaps it was me that connected to music on a different level that continues to this day.

Chapter 4. Lessons

4.1. Lesson for Life

A carpenter ant, the type that is shiny black and seems like a pumped up giant that has been working out in the (ant) gym when compared to the ordinary size of its normal species, is walking along the concrete path in my back garden. I see it out the corner of my eye and wonder if it is on a mission to destroy a wall of our house or fence or something else wooden, but no, not this carpenter ant. I was there in that spot where our lives crossed because I was putting a recharged battery back in our boys' toy John Deere truck, so they could ride it around the garden, something they had been doing over the summer. However, today was different and what happened in a split second kept me awake on more than one occasion.

As I was just putting the battery back on, both our boys were standing by me, watching carefully how I was doing it. I assumed their careful attention was so that they could do the same in the future. It is amazing how focussed and attentive children can be when they have a vested interest. As the carpenter ant came by, my younger 5-year-old son quickly looked at it and, in an instant, stamped on it with his right foot. A powerful thud from such a little leg. It happened so fast, the poor little ant's life extinguished in a split second. Before I could even utter "no," let alone the question "what do you think you are doing?", it was all over. The ant was flattened onto concrete and all that remained was a motionless black paint-like blotch. I could not do a thing to prevent this killing because our boy did not have time to plot the murder of the little creature. I would have stopped him if I had known he was going to do such a thing, but it was almost instinctual or reactionary. It was something that most children have done in their early years and something that many adults do in their lives. However, for me to witness my little boy killing an ant mercilessly was quite shocking, simply because it is not something I do. My instant reaction was to confront him on the spot and say " Hey, what did you do that for?" He looked at me with confusion. Before he could even say a word, I continued with "that's not nice, what did that ant do to you?" I am not sure what he thought, but his look was that of confusion. So, I calmly explained to him that he had no right to kill anything that was not going to hurt him. I added that "we don't know if that ant was a mother ant or a child ant or if it was going home or not, but its ant family will never know where it is

now? He continued to look at me confused and speechless, but managed to utter half of a “I don....no...” I stopped myself there and then. I realized in a flash that I found myself doing exactly what my mother had done with me when I was nearly his age. You see, that formidable decades old lesson went into my being, right into my bones, flesh and blood, and never left. I fully embodied it, as Snowber (2016) and Smith (1992) would say. It became one of those ‘vivid moments of earlier life’ that now constitute a kind of “body memory” (Smith 1991, p.160).

If there was ever a moment that encapsulates virtually all that Smith (1991, 1992) is saying about how childhood remembrances can be a source of pedagogical thoughtfulness, it was right here in my back garden, where I was instantly and unexpectedly taken back to my childhood, and used that remembrance as a pedagogical moment both for my boys and for myself. Rightly or wrongly, I had implemented that lesson and made it part of my everyday living. It has been the ridicule of some family and friends at times when they see me removing a fly, wasp, bee or a spider from inside the house by a method I have perfected over the years. That method involves a glass and a sheet of paper. I gently place the glass over the little intruder so as not to kill it and once trapped, I slide a slightly stiff piece of paper underneath to prevent escape, and then go outside to release it. I have perfected this art and carried out this procedure virtually all my life. I do not recall a single lesson I learned in my formal schooling that I still practice today, but this little lesson from my mother has stayed with me to this day. It is something those who visit have the unfortunate experience to witness in action but fail to understand, especially if they are scared of such things as spiders, wasps, or even flies. I hear them all the time saying, “just kill it” and when I do not, they think I am ‘nuts’ or something like that. I am never shocked to see how adults, thousands the size of such tiny creatures, have developed a fear and often phobia of such little living things that we share our planet with. I understand if the adult’s life or safety is threatened, but often that is not the case. If it was a lethal tarantula or a scorpion, I too would be terrified. Do not get me wrong, I have had to kill such things in my time, but only as the very last recourse, such as having to remove a wasp nest. Then I say a little prayer for their souls and seek forgiveness for ending life. For me personally, it does not end with tiny little insects or trees. Over the past two years moles have virtually destroyed my new lawn and I could not do anything to hurt them, as much as I wanted to stop them wrecking the best bit of grass in my garden. Sometimes it feels a terrible burden, particularly because

I am not religious by any means, but I do believe that something beyond our imagination and knowledge creates such life and that I should not destroy what I cannot replace or recreate myself. Call it what you will, but nature is as powerful as any God that there is to witness, as Annie Dillard (2007) testifies in her book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. At least that is how I see it, and hold true to the notion that every living thing has an equal right to its life on this planet.

As I was trying to explain that deliberate killing of any living thing was wrong to my youngest sons, I found myself caught in the situation of reliving my mother's beliefs. Was I just regurgitating what my mother told me or were these my beliefs? Was such thinking and way of being right? Who decides what I was saying was right or wrong? Was I right in telling such information to my young boys and have them live their life like mine, chasing tiny things around the house with a glass and paper? There have been many times when I just wished I did not care and could just stamp on such little invaders and not have even an ounce of guilt, like I have witnessed so many in my life, but I just cannot. I just do not have the heart to kill them when they present no real threat to my or my family's life. So, do I want my children to grow up with such a burden? Do I want them to be like me and have a tormented conscience every time they see a fly, wasp, spider or an ant in the house? Here was an example of a moment where "The nostalgia of childhood remembrance may even give us a sense of what we might do to make the present better" (Smith 1991, p. 162), and I tried to honor it there and then.

I realize all this sounds quite ridiculous, but here is the bigger question behind it all: if we, as humans cannot develop empathy and respect for such tiny living things, then how can we develop respect for other sentient and non-sentient beings that we share this planet with? My children have never seen me deliberately kill an ant, a fly, a spider or a moth, so I wondered where my son got the idea to just stamp on that ant from? Where did he get the killing idea from? Preschool maybe? Maybe he saw another child do something similar? I did ask him a day or so after, but he said he did not know. Do I want to give them such a powerful lesson for life that I got so early on? I do not know the answer to that question.

4.2. Corrected

My experience of early childhood was that of a complete freedom. I was free to do almost anything providing I was not to hurt any living thing after that formidable early lesson. I remember roaming around the whole village without a care in the world. No one to really answer to and more importantly, no one to teach me the 'rules of schooling' as Jackson (1968) describes how we get taught to behave in the progress of our early education. As Jackson points out, it is in elementary schooling that we first learn the rules of what we are made to believe is education, teaching, learning, what a classroom looks like and how to behave in it. It is here, as children, we learn what school corridors look like and how we are to behave in them, even to the point of what toilets and washrooms look like. It seems that most of our schools, classrooms, corridors and washrooms all still bear the hallmarks of Foucault's descriptions in *The Means of Correct Training* (Foucault 1995, pp.170-194).

Although our schools are modern, and they adopt the most up to date educational practices, they have yet to generally move beyond what Foucault called the 'Hierarchical observation' (p. 170), "Normalizing judgment" (p. 177) and the 'role of the examination' (p. 184), let alone the design of classrooms, corridors, and playgrounds. Even our very own university, although built on top of a mountain to emulate the great schools of thought from Greece, still has the hallmarks of what Foucault describes as the characteristics of 'Ecole Militaire' (p. 172). A walk along most of the classroom corridors will reveal doors with their half windows, all virtually conforming to the Ecole Militaire formulaic design, and to the notion of what Foucault calls 'seeing without being seen' (p. 173). The role of 'discipline' and 'examination' complete the picture for most modern school settings.

As with most people in the West, being formally taught in such environments has been my experience. In return, I have also taught in similar places and conditions. No wonder we have a preconceived notion of what we generally believe to be education and its process of teaching and learning. I too, was like one of those kids in a classroom among 20 or so behind desks, "being talked at mostly, boringly mostly" (Egan 1997, p. 7). Somehow it did not feel right or natural, it felt contrived. Yet, we are all (children, youth and adults) generally made to believe that it is in such environments that real learning takes place, whether it be in a school, college or university. Yet again, there is

something strange about sitting in such sterile classrooms with their similarly dull colored walls, like spaces used to calm prisoners and other institutionalized populations, inhaling the 'universal smell' of cleaning products that 'permeates the entire building' with 'standardized odors of the classroom' (Jackson 1968, p.7). How can such places compare with the outside world that showed me so much real life? The real world of ants, worms, snakes and birds in their environment that was also my environment, mutually shared.

My point is that it was in such school surroundings that I was 'corrected' and 'normalized' into accepting the 'dominant view' of the way it is, the 'correct way' (Evernden, 1993, p.103). It was in such schools that I was educated out of nature and into how most people in the West think. Manish Jain Shikshantar of *The People's Institute for Rethinking Education and Development*, in India sums up this process:

One of the great tragedies of schooling is how it has ripped people out from nature and locked them into rooms for eight hours a day and I think the profound kind of damage that's doing to us, only we'll recognize generations from now and thinking that creating concrete jails and locking people up into that and giving them books that tell them about nature is a better way to think about life than actually spending time in nature.

(Shikshantar 2010)

This process of replacing learning from nature is what Leopold (1966) warned us against decades ago when he said, "Education, I fear, is the learning to see one thing by going blind to another" (p. 168). I certainly became 'blind' to many things.

My experience of schooling in England is not that unique, but it did provide some blindness. I believe such shift in education happens to most school children. We replace the natural world as the teacher with the qualified, teacher trained expert and believe we can educate in the most effective way. From one perspective this is true, as I and countless others testify. However, we need to recognize that replacing learning from self and nature with that of modern classrooms, that are not really that modern physically except in terms of material and intent, is not the only way to learn. Nothing demonstrates this better than Carol Black's *Schooling the World* documentary (Marlens, Hurst & Grossan 2010) that shows how modern Western education is replacing traditional teaching, something that Bowers (2007) has been very critical of.

My mother was obviously somehow connected to the earth. She listened to what the earth was saying (Abram 1997) and knew that everything was interconnected. How was this possible, given she never went to school, never attended one single lesson or spent a minute in class as a student? She obviously never read Evernden, Sheperd or Von Uexkull Stoll, who makes virtually the same point that my mother made in her lesson to me. Von Uexkull Stoll (Evernden 1993) maintains that the “tick’s world” is “every bit as valid and adequate as our own” and that “All animals, simple or complex, are fitted into their unique worlds with equal completeness” (p. 80). It seems that my mother knew instinctively or from a different worldview, or from those other teachers called earth, nature and oral history, that “Each organism has its world, and that enables it to function and persist. Each lives within that world to which it is made” (Evernden 1993, p. 103). This, of course can also be seen in the human world. For example, the Inuit live and adapt to their cold ‘world,’ as do the Bantu, who live and adapt to their hot ‘world’ of South Africa.

Where did my mother’s deep and profound beliefs come from? Furthermore, why did I, who also believed in all those cultural values growing up, then dismissed them as a result of my ‘superior educated’ views of the West? Although I was schooled in the West, what happened to me was exactly what Helena Hodge says “modern Western education” creates for those who readily identify with or manage to fit in the mainstream culture. She states:

The schoolbooks talk about a Western urban consumer culture as progress, as the only way to be and the end result is the children end up feeling that their own culture, their language, their way of doing things, is backward, primitive and shameful.

(Hodge 2010)

I ended up believing that my Western views were superior and often right, even though deep down inside I knew they were different. Why? Because I had the “*two-eyed seeing*” quality Vicki Kelly (2012, p. 365) speaks of that allowed a view of many things from an alternative and equally valid perspective. Like Kelly, I was “standing in two worlds,” something I did not understand fully but knew existed, as I experienced it each day. Unlike Kelly, who did not compromise what she was seeing with her “indigenous eye” and the “integrity” with which it was seeing, who did not give in to seeing with only the “Western eye” with its afforded higher status, I mostly dismissed my traditional,

cultural values. I did not understand that the “two-eyed seeing complement each other precisely because they don’t blend and blur each other’s reality” (p. 365). Such insight was decades away. Everyday examples of this “two-eyed seeing” range from the simple experience of making a cup of tea to the more complex issues, such as religion. For example, in my home, a cup of tea was never made in the English manner, with boiling water poured onto the tea leaves (or later teabags) in a teapot and left to stew, with milk added later. No, tea in my home was made like the traditional Indian way of ‘cha.’ This process entailed tea leaves and sugar boiling in water for anything up to 15 minutes, and then adding milk to the boiling dark liquid, which is then brought to boiling point. These were two ways of having a cup of tea, but with very different taste. My white school friends only saw tea being made one way and according to them, that was the only way to make a cup of tea. It took me a long time and by long time I mean well into my late twenties to become open to the idea to making tea the ‘cha’ way, and more importantly, to see it as being legitimate. Such is the recovery time from such simple abandonments where the Western way was adopted to be the right way.

One reason why such a shift occurred with me is rooted in what Evernden (1993) calls the “official version of the way the world is,” the “Cartesian world-view, the scientific world-view, or just as the dominant social paradigm” (p.103). Another reason is what Abrams (1996) describes in his chapter *In the Landscape of Language* (pp. 137-179) how we, in the “Western civilization become so estranged from the non-human nature” and the “Storied earth.” We are educated out of our innate connection to our self and nature and that knowledge and ‘way of being’ is replaced by the so called modern, ‘official and correct’ view.

To this end, Shepard (1982) asks and provides a whole host of reasons as to why schools educate us out of nature. The case Shepard lays out is hard to argue against, with his comprehensive sweep of history and the key movements that have brought us to this point as humans in the world. Not only do schools and the educational process do to most what it did to me, but they also take us away from our natural place and environment. They do this by substituting natural learning places with classrooms and believing that is where children, youth and adults best learn. However, as I learned in my childhood and as Shepard (p. x) points out, “In the natural world there is no end to

what can be learned.” Rawlins¹⁵ adds: “But my teachers stayed inside, and more than anything else, school was a confinement. We sat in hard chairs, in dull rooms of brick, while outside rain fell and flowers bloomed.” I cannot help but agree, especially when such statements have the echoes of Jackson and Foucault’s assertion of the school being like a ‘prison or a mental institution,’ not in terms of the treatment of prisoners and patients, but the fact that children have to be there and that they will be subjected to a particular ‘means of correct training.’ The similarity between schools and prisons is also one that Sameshima & Dubel make when they say that “no adult” they interviewed “could deny the similarities between school and prison, although without a doubt, school was kinder and gentler variety and definitely preferred” (2012, p. 325). That was how my school friends and I got educated.

4.3. Formal Education

My “other education” happened *the way it did* because my ‘formal’ education was *the way it was*. Maybe if my ‘formal’ education had been driven by the ‘concept of interest’ (MacKinnon 2013) or ‘passion-based’ (Robertson 2013; Barseghian 2011) or indeed along the practical lines that Holt (1965, 1967) or Postman and Weingartner (1969) with their insightful learning activities and questioning suggested, my experience of education might have been different. Even Julia Weber’s approach (Holt 1967, pp. 135-139) with her one room school where children carried out their own learning projects arising out of questions they raised and were interested in rather than being set for them, would have been more meaningful than the classroom education I got. All that happened before approaches like ‘project-based learning’ were formalised, characterized by the crucial distinction that the teacher is NOT setting the learning objectives and goals, where real learning is driven by student interest rather than the dictates and constraints of teacher or the stated curriculum. It is the student’s desire to want to know that drives and determines where real learning comes from, naturally as opposed to being enforced. These kinds of approaches would have naturally followed that sacred observation from Socrates that “all learning starts with the desire to know.” Unfortunately, that was not my experience or that of my school friends and I would argue the experience of most who leave school in their teens. As a teacher I certainly did not put the needs of the students

¹⁵ Rawlins in his Foreword in Shepard (1982, p. x-xi)

first. I put my needs first, the needs of achieving my lesson plan aims, covering the syllabus and trying to get the students to pass their courses or modules, or as Aoki (2005) would say, the “Curriculum-as-plan.” What the students needed, wanted or preferred never really entered into the equation. It was always about the college’s needs coming first. Such is the internalised and external pressure on teachers, imposed by the working conditions in the educational system as a whole.

Most of public schooling today across most parts of the world is based on the industrial model introduced and developed in North America and Western Europe. It is a model based on industrial and economic efficiency and has been dominated in the past century by curriculum determined by science. As William Doll (1993) points out, “Scientific knowledge was not merely the knowledge of most worth, it was the only knowledge of worth” (p. 51). Although this model of schooling has been questioned for its various flaws through the years, it nevertheless continues to evolve in a piecemeal approach with science still having the major influence. Even though there have been a “a few millennia of arguments about educating” (Blenkinsop & Egan 2009, p.86) and many have provided serious critiques, such as Whitehead (1967), Dewey (1938/2015), Freire (1996), Illich (1970), Reimer (1971), Holt (1965), Doll (1993), Hampton (1995), McClaren (1994), Bowers (2005), Egan (1997), and so many others, the industrial model of schooling continues with changes here and there. Doll (1993) provides a clear overview of education and its change from the pre-modern to the modern, with all the difficulties that still linger well into the 21st century, with issues that range from the mechanization of the school curriculum to scientific rationality (p. 33). Doll summarizes: “Currently, we “gear up” for tasks, keep classes “on-track,” and “produce results” (p. 13). That practice and way of working has not shifted very much since I was at school or when I was the one doing the teaching. As a teacher, I too ‘geared up’ for tasks, tried my best to keep classes ‘on track’ and ‘produce results.’ Doll concludes that “modern thought has not provided a good model for the education of human beings” (p. 26). The net result is that student engagement in the learning process is a constant challenge for most teachers in the modern schooling system, characterized by large class sizes, fragmented curriculum and standardized testing, where most teaching ends up being routine and ‘boring’ (Egan, 1997; 2008), and the learning experience for most becomes routine and boring as well.

Another critical effect of this production aspect of the school is the lack of time for teachers to engage meaningfully with their students. Very rarely do teachers know what

is happening in their students' lives. My own personal teaching experience was a testament to this in the early nineties and reflected Pascarella and Terenzin's (1991) findings that approximately forty five percent of first year students never talk with their faculty. Such is the production nature of modern schooling, where teachers struggle to find time to engage with the students beyond the scheduled classroom session. Snowber's (2005) call for and insight that "Listening to the underside of what is happening in student's life is a sacred act and one that must take form in the soil of mindfulness and loving kindness" (p. 247) is very rarely found in practice. The only exception is the need to deal with extraordinary circumstances, emergencies or difficulties. I believe this is still the case for many newcomers to further and higher education, both students and teachers.

Being aware of what is going on in students' lives is not just a matter for out of class discussions or enquiries regarding their welfare or otherwise, but also can have a direct impact on what goes on in the classroom. One example from my own experience still haunts me to this day. One of my students, a seventeen-year-old female was yawning and looking somewhat tired at 9.30 in the morning, to which I half-jokingly remarked that maybe she "should have gone to sleep a little earlier" the night before so she could be more alert. This was a mixed class of 17-18 years olds with whom I had a good working relationship (that was my opinion, but the students may have thought otherwise?) therefore. I could say such things, so I thought. The look that young girl gave me upon hearing my words is one I remember to this day. Through her non-verbal response, it was like she was saying "what do you know?" or "If you only knew?" or "how dare you?". I knew instantly what I had said did not land well. Whereas other times it would have just been laughed off by all concerned, this time it was different. I found out a few weeks later that the student was pregnant, and we had to plan for her study while she was going to give birth during the academic year. Shock, horror! How could I have said such a thing when God knows what she must have been dealing with at that time with all the decisions that a 17-year-old would have to make facing an unexpected pregnancy. My insensitivity to all that was going on in her world and the effect my words had on her could have all been avoided if I had taken the time to listen to "the underside" of what was happening. The reality of most teachers is that they cannot know all that is going on in every student's world outside the classroom, but if I had paid some close attention, for which I had no time, I could have dealt with that particular matter very

differently. I also would have had the added benefit of not carrying the burden of guilt from my actions all these years. Oh, the little things that can have such impact!

Any discussion on the role of education has to be recognized as being on a contested terrain, peppered with many points of view. I know from my experience: the prominent role of colleges was to prepare individuals for the economy first and foremost. The role of colleges in British Columbia or North America, it could be argued, is much the same. Here, in Vancouver and the rest of the Lower Mainland, the marketing of college-based programs is virtually always from a specific job or career perspective. Every advertisement along the Skytrain routes promotes a program for specific technical training for certain occupations. The same applies to the local print media. A quick glance through the Vancouver Sun or the free weeklies such Georgia Straight, The Metro, Surrey Now, Peace Arch News, all show virtually every post-secondary school doing the same. The private post-secondary schools are especially prominent. This alone suggests that these schools want to be perceived as providing preparation for employment first and foremost. The complicity of schooling in fueling the economic interest was highlighted by Laurence Stone (in Postman):

One effect of industrial capitalism (...) was... to add support for the penal and disciplinary aspects of school, which were seen by some largely as a system to break the will and to condition the child to routinized labour in the factory.

(1995, p. 53)

My experience as a professional teacher and an educator is largely from the U.K. post-secondary sector. U.K. colleges were judged mainly for their effectiveness of achieving government targets, not the personal development of the individual. That is not dissimilar to the goals of North American colleges. The personal development of students is really secondary and subsumed in the overall attainment of the qualifications studied. It is naturally assumed that students will be more educated if they pass their qualifications.

The fact that schools prepare children for the economy has been highlighted by many, including Bowls and Gintis, who maintain that “No sophisticated educational theory has overlooked the fact that schools prepare youth for economic life” (1976, p.68). Nowhere was this better demonstrated than when I was asked in 1993 to give a career talk to 15 year-olds who were making educational choices based on potential

future careers. The following year the age was lowered to 14, so that the children could decide which GCSE's¹⁶ to take for the upcoming final two years of their compulsory education. Even more startling was the request the year after, when I was asked (and refused) to give a similar career choice talk to 13 years olds, so they could best plan for and choose a year in advance which GCSE's would be best suited to their eventual career choice. Writing this now feels so surreal that educators actually did this, all in the name of competition, a race to secure students from neighboring colleges in order to fill programs. I should have resisted such ventures because I had an intuition that it was wrong, but did not trust that and let the head rule the heart as we so often do. Had I known at the time (and had the confidence) to listen to my body, I could have spared such nonsense being hurled at those children at their tender age of fourteen. Sadly, I was not alone in imposing such advice, as Postman points out: "In some schools, children as young as eleven and twelve have inflicted upon them what is called "career training" (1994, p.152). It is no wonder that Postman (1994) criticizes education for its contribution to what he calls *The Disappearance of Childhood*.

4.4. Another Side of Education

My elementary and secondary school education was not that different from the education of most of the young people in the West. My school friends and companions were a testament to that, as were the hundreds of students I stood in front of and also came across as a teacher. However, there was one important aspect of my secondary schooling (from 11 to 16 years or middle to high school as it is known in North America), that completely separated me from my 'white' peers. That, of course, was assimilation. Assimilation was something that my peers did not need. Assimilation, that procedure that Cashmore and Troyna succinctly describe as:

The process of incorporating a freshly arriving group with a distinct culture into the host society in such a way as to make the incoming group conform to established cultural patterns and, eventually, disappear as an identifiable group of people.

(1990, p. 63)

¹⁶ General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) qualifications are offered to children at the age of 14 to prepare them for their Advanced Level (A and AS levels as they are commonly known as), to determine their suitability for higher education or other route after leaving school.

In education practice this simply meant that any student who was from an ethnic minority was to be integrated into the “mainstream culture of the school as quickly and with as little fuss as possible” (p 138). This ‘aim’ was widely incorporated and implemented in the sixties and seventies, not only because it was a policy directive from government but also because it corresponded with the views and was the belief of most (but not all) teachers of that period. Cashmore and Troyna remind us that “School based surveys of this period reflected just how far those at the ‘chalk face’ shared and endorsed this idea”. Gillborn (1990) also highlights this, using some influential work from the sixties:

Jenny Williams found that teachers conceived of their role as ‘putting over a certain set of values (Christian), a code of behaviour (middle class), and a set of academic and job aspirations in which white collar jobs have higher prestige than manual, clean jobs than dirty..’

(Cashmore & Troyna 1990, p, 138; Gillborn 1990, p. 144)

Similar views continued to be expressed in the early seventies. Cashmore and Troyna explain this using the work of H. E. R. Townsend and Elaine Britton, in their work for the Schools Council in London where they detail views commonly held by educators. They quote one headteacher who expressed her belief that it was not the job of an “English State School to cater for the development of cultures and customs of a foreign nature. I believe our duty is to prepare children for citizenship in a free, democratic society according to British standards and customs” (1990, p. 138). This was hardly surprising given that assimilation policy was driving educational policy. As Banks and Lynch (1986) point out, “Assimilationists maintain that the primary goal of the school should be to socialize students so that they attain the knowledge, attributes and skills needed to become effective citizens of their nation-states” (p. 21). The hugely significant effect of the assimilation policy swayed an awful lot of practitioners of the day to the point that:

the educational system was sacrosanct, the cultural values and assumptions which underpin it and the society in general were non-negotiable. If minority group children wanted to succeed within that system and gain the qualifications which their teachers and parents informed them were necessary to get a good job, indeed any job, they were compelled to reject their own cultural identity.

(Cashmore & Troyna 1990, p. 138)

Although I did not see at the time, my experience and that of my parents was the same as that of many immigrants who came to England from the Indian sub-continent. It was also remarkably similar to that of immigrants to other countries, such as Canada, as Kouch (2013) describes: “We arrived in a land where people did not speak our language, understand our culture nor celebrate our traditions. They did not seem to want to understand our ways; they were more concerned that we learn *their* ways” (p. 8). That was our family’s experience in a nutshell. I also had to do exactly what Kouch did in school, having “to navigate through the hallways, the curricula and education system that did not reflect who we were and what we brought to school” (p.8). Of course, I had no idea of this at the time and I just went along with all that I had to do. I did not question why was it I had to go to school? Why this particular school? Why am I learning all this stuff that makes very little sense to me? What about all the things I knew, that I came here with, that world of the outside? All these types of questions got pushed deep inside and I just assumed this to be what I was supposed to do, because I was told by my parents, and the school with its rules of attendance, punctuality and classroom etiquette. This was all part of a policy that I had no clue about as I entered the school system, and for decades after.

The driving force behind such policies was figuring how best to resolve the contradiction between ethnic and cultural values of the migrants and those of middle-class British people. The thinking that dominated the discourse on the policy front was that of the immigrant being the problem, as Gillborn (1990) explains: “1950’s and 60’s educational policies were premised on the belief that ‘immigrant’ communities presented a problem which would be solved once they had been assimilated into ‘British’ (white, middle-class) system of norms and values” (p. 204). England was not alone in this approach, as all Western nations were “dominated by an assimilationist ideology” (Banks & Lynch 1986, p. 2). The implementation of this policy and its influence on education has been highlighted by many (Cashmore & Troyna 1990; Gillborn 1990; Brandt 1986; Banks & Lynch 1986; Swann Report 1985). Also highlighted were the failures of such policy because the “assimilationist thesis proved to be not only inadequate but unacceptable” (Brandt 1986, p. 95). Brandt maintained that “With the proven inadequacy of assimilation as a policy and philosophy, the integration phase was begun” (p. 13). Despite a policy of Integration being implemented as the successor, it too “suffered a not dissimilar fate to its predecessor of assimilation” (Brandt 1986, p. 95).

Gillborn (1990) argues that “policies based on the assumptions of assimilation/integration” were bound to fail because they were:

...ill-conceived, partial and often racist (...) The basic values of such policies devalued ethnic minority people, reducing them to the status of a problem which would go away as they became just another part of society. Such an approach was bound to fail.”

(p. 147).

Eventually, by the late 1980s, there was a recognition of the “failure of past policies” and a recognition of “the racist nature of the assimilationist and integrationist perspectives which had labelled minority groups as a problem while seeking to protect the status quo” (Gillborn 1990, p. 171).

When I started my secondary school, I was only one of three non-white students in the whole school. There was a girl in my year and an older boy in years above, and that was it in a school of approximately 700 students. Naturally, like most students of the school, I had no idea of the assimilation policy or its deliberate intentions at the time, and just accepted and believed that schools did what they had to do, and that was what schooling was about. This was the early seventies. Acculturation as described by Banks and Lynch (1986) had yet to be tried in English schools. Multicultural education (Lynch 1989), Cultural Pluralism (Postman 1995) and Anti-racist education (Brandt 1986) had yet to take root in the mainstream education and begin to have some influence on some elements of curriculum, let alone deal with all the issues that are raised by Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (2004) in their chapter “Understanding Curriculum as a Racial Text” (pp. 315-357). Furthermore, this was a time when, “school texts and library books presenting negative images of black people remained on classroom and library shelves and teachers adhered rigidly to the ethnocentric bias of the curriculum” (Gillborn 1990, p. 139). As a teenager, I did not know any different and just accepted that in England and in school, this was just how it was supposed to be. While I came in with some “personal experience” and had a short “cultural” history, when I entered “curriculum situations with knowledge and experience” that was all but disregarded, in line with how it had been “historically ignored in education” (Fang He, Phillion, Chan & Xu 2008, p. 223).

Even though my friends, who were all white, accepted me for who I was (which I was grateful for), there was always a slight feeling that I was not entirely like them. I must have instinctively realized as Thomas King (2003) did, that “part of it was being poor in a rich country, and part of it was knowing that white was more than just a colour” (p. 2). So, to fit in even more, I began to live that ‘double life’ that so many young people have to live but more so those from ethnic cultures (Hiro 1992). In my home, life was very much dictated by my parents’ way of being and living, especially in terms of food, language, values and even company, whereas outside the home, my life was very much in line with my friends’ ‘English’ way of life. This was so much so, that I began to resent my own cultural ethnic aspects, cultural values of my parents and their ethnic community. Little did I know that what was really going on was the “compromise” that Hiro (1992) speaks of, that I was making the compromise that children of ethnic parents make to adapt and fit in, “achieved by shredding parts of their hereditary cultural core” (p. 152).

I became that “Asian Youngster” who wanted and felt the need “to fully adopt Western values” because I so desperately wanted to be like all my white friends. This is not surprising, because our house was the first non-white house in the whole village, located smack in the centre of the village, overlooking the village green and the main street shops and only pub. Plus, virtually everything I was seeing in society at large and through our two black and white TV Channels (BBC One and ITV) was being viewed through ‘white lens’ (Twitchin 1988). I slotted right into that group of teenagers that Hiro speaks of: “If an Asian youngster wished to fully adopt Western values, he had no alternative but to sever his connections with the family and disown his religious and cultural heritage” (p. 158). I was on my way to the “10 years” mark that was assumed to be “ample time to assimilate into the ‘British’ way of life” (Gillborn 1990, p. 144). Except, I had enormous difficulty in disowning my family, so strong were those ties and bond.

The cultural heritage I came from was different: I began to view it as being ‘backward,’ with the exception of certain aspects that I could not, so they got pushed into my own newly created internal ‘underground,’ that place where only I could see them and use whenever I needed to without having to explain to others. This underground internal space also became my reservoir of different knowledge that I could easily draw on when I had to engage in family or ethnic community events. Try as I might, I could not always succeed in pushing such certain things away because little did I know that they

were always going to be a part of me, no matter how hard I tried to 'block' and dismiss them. This was the power of embodiment that I had yet to see and understand. I had fully embraced that Cartesian mindset that anything and everything that was important had to come from the brain and intellect. I had no idea at the time that the body had its own memory, that it would and act as a "memorial container" and a "place of memories" (Smith 1992, p.87), and that no matter how hard I tried to dispose, block, forget, pretend or believe it did not exist, it would always be there, waiting to resurface. But I did that thing that years of Instrumentalism lead one to do: dismiss such knowledge. As Brandt (1986) explains, if "black people gave up their deficient and inadequate cultures and assimilated into the non-existent 'monolithic' British culture they would in all, but colour, become White and thereby become acceptable." (p. 13). Therein lay the obvious problem: one cannot change one's skin colour unless you happen to be Michael Jackson. Brandt points out that "even for those Black people who, as it were, accepted the principle of 'becoming White', the going proved rough if not impossible" (p.13). Such concern would come later in life, but for now schooling was made to be as enjoyable as it could be, and that was done mostly without the assistance of teachers or the curriculum.

The most enjoyable times of my secondary schooling were the social aspects: walking to and from school with my new-found friends, the sports aspects and all that "under life of classrooms" Gershon (2017) speaks of, which "operates in the same classroom at the same time as the formal teaching is being conducted" (p. 12). Gershon's two examples of "classroom underlife in action," where "students quickly tell jokes or manage to shoot rubber bands across the room when a teacher is writing on the board" fade in comparison with the kind of things I was up to with some of my closest classmates. Here are my two examples to support Gershon's notion of 'classroom underlife.' The first one involved throwing what we called an "upducky". I am not sure who or when this act was invented or named. It consisted of chewing blotting paper until it turned into mush and at lightning speed, throwing it across the room (when the teacher was facing or writing on the chalkboard) and watching it out the corner of the eye hitting the wall or a window with a splatter, making unusual patterns or worse, going across the room with a poor launch and landing on a fellow class member. The latter usually involved the class being disrupted with silence that was very hard to keep under the breath while the teacher tried to make an inquiry as to what just happened and who was

responsible. Fits of laughter were contained with the skill of award-winning actors. The other antic only happened once in a while and involved cutting a small strand of hair from a friend's head while they were sitting at the desk immediately in front of you, usually in the last two rows at the back of the classroom. The skill in question involved managing to cut the inviting bit of hair without your friend noticing that a tiny lock was all of a sudden detached from the rest of his hair. We were too smart to try that on any female in class, knowing too well what the outcome could have been. Then, the best part: the hair cutters would glue the hair onto a drawing on a sheet of paper for a 3D kind of effect. The artwork would be secretly passed around the class without the teacher and the friend with the missing lock detecting it, with laughter fully contained, apart from the occasional snigger.

These were only two such antics that made school enjoyable, as well as most of the 'lived curriculum' of the classroom (Aoki 2005, p. 160) and the 'lived curriculum' of corridors and the school yard. However, what I did not realize was the transformation that was going on during this time. That transformation was not so much of the educational type that Freire (1970) or bell hooks (1994) speak of, where one feels liberated, but rather of the intended type of assimilation. Despite the flaws and failures of assimilationist policies, they did have their success. They certainly worked on me. My schooling in England ensured I was successfully assimilated. Whether this was similar to 'the "impressive success" of assimilation in the US, Canada and Australia that Banks and Lynch (1986, p. 4) spoke of or not, it certainly had a remarkable effect on me. I could easily be the poster boy of assimilation. Lord Macaulay would have been proud of me as I fully fulfilled his vision and now belonged to "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour...English in taste, in opinion, in morals, in intellect"¹⁷ (Black 2010). The education Lord Macaulay had advocated for Indians in their homeland, where it was touted that "Macaulay's children would be brown on the outside and white on the inside" (Black 2010) had done an exceptional job in Macaulay's homeland, in the town of Leicester.

¹⁷ Lord Macaulay in his 'Minutes of Macaulay' (Marlens, N, Hurst, J. & Grossan, M. (Producers), Black, C. (Director). (2010).

Chapter 5. Education

5.1. Schooling

I have a reasonable question, maybe not for a five-year-old at the beginning of their schooling, but certainly for an adult, especially if that adult is an educator. The question I never asked myself in my 25 years as a professional educator was a basic one, but not actually a simple one: “What exactly is education?” This is one of those most obvious and dare I say, “embarrassingly general and fundamental questions” (Eagleton 1990, p. 34) that should have been addressed at the very beginning of my educational career. It is a question that was never raised in my teacher training or during my master’s degree in education. Reflecting back, it seems very strange that such a basic question never surfaced in all those years of my professional work in the field. In fact, it was only partway through my PhD study, as I reflected on my experiences as a student and as an educator through a new lens, that this question arose and completely stumped me. When I tried to answer it, I struggled and as an experienced educator, was embarrassed to admit that I had never come across such a basic, yet essential question. Obviously, I just took it for granted that I knew what education was simply because I worked in it. Plus, everybody knows what education is, right? Thankfully, Ken Robinson offers some consolation to alleviate my embarrassment:

Part of the problem with identifying the things we take for granted is that we don’t know what they are because we take them for granted in the first place. They become basic assumptions that we don’t question, part of the fabric of our logic. We don’t question them because we see them as fundamental, as an integral part of our lives. Like air. Or gravity.

(Robinson 2009, p.30)

Asking such a basic and ‘fundamental’ question did not seem necessary because it was assumed everybody knew the answer. It is a bit like asking “what is air?” or “what is music?” That sounds ridiculous because everybody knows what air and music are, right? Maybe not, as we shall later see. Regardless, the idea of questioning what is education never entered my head. Maybe it was a good question to have asked when I was five years old, in the way children ask “*the really tough questions that it often seems only children can (will) ask*” (Smith 2015, p. 27). Had I had the insight at that tender age, then maybe, just maybe, I would not have struggled to answer such a question now.

That is assuming I would have got the appropriate or the correct answer, assuming that such answer existed. But none of that happened, just as it did not happen in my professional career.

Putting embarrassment aside, I have to say “thank God for Robert Fulghum!” Yes, that Robert Fulghum who became famous with his book ‘All I Really Need to Know, I Learned in Kindergarten’ (Fulghum 1988), a book about insights, often of deep and profound nature, about life and living, coming from the simplest and everyday events, encounters or incidents. Even though Fulghum did not get everything right, as Postman (1995, p. 46) and Herman (1995) observe, he did provide valuable insights into early childhood education and beyond. However, it was in a less known book, where Fulghum (1995) provided me with the reassurance that I am not alone in NOT questioning something that I practiced for many years or as he says, not giving it “serious thought.” I take heed as I draw a strong parallel with Fulghum, who worked as “a parish minister for many years,” giving advice and words of comfort and joy to countless in need at ceremonies marking births, deaths, saying “grace at family meals, the reaffirmation of wedding vows and ways to heal wounds suffered in personal conflict” (p. viii). He was a resource when “people requested help with the rituals of solitude, such as meditation, prayer, and contemplation.” After ‘many years’ of this (often very personal) work, Fulghum (1995) confesses:

I’m supposed to know about such things. But the truth is that while I’ve performed and participated in such rituals for many years, I’ve never given the subject the careful thought it deserves.

(p.viii).

That is exactly how I felt! I had worked in education for all those years teaching, advising, offering counsel to numerous students and student teachers, telling teachers how to be more effective, yet I never gave ‘the subject the careful,’ and in my case, the serious ‘thought it deserved.’

It is of some comfort that it is not only in education such questioning does NOT occur, and that it also happens in other professional careers as well. There are reasons why such situations occur, and I will touch upon them later, as they have to do (in part) with the process we call ‘schooling.’ Charles Silberman (1971) puts such lack of questioning down to “mindlessness.” He states:

What is mostly wrong with public schools is not due to venality or indifference or stupidity but to mindlessness.... It simply never occurs to more than a handful, to ask why they are doing what they are doing to think seriously or deeply about the purposes or consequences of education.

(p.10)

Whilst this does not apply to every educator, it certainly applies to many, and I was no exception. I never seriously or deeply questioned “why I was doing what I was doing” and as a teacher, I certainly I never asked myself the critical question that Kruger-Ross (2016) asks on the first line of his introduction to his doctoral thesis: “what does it mean to be a teacher”? (p. 1). For me, there certainly was one very good reason for that: being too busy ‘teaching’ or delivering what was required by the syllabus and the school so that students would pass and get their qualifications. This is similar to many educators’ experience, as Britton (2013) and Rokhiyah (2015) demonstrate.

As bell hooks points out, “In colleges and universities, teaching is often the least valued of our many professional tasks” (p. 203), yet it is still the priority for most teachers. My experience was no different as a teacher and as an administrator. I was doing that “slavish adherence to the time-table and lesson-plan, the obsession with routine *qua* routine” (Silberman 1971, p.10). In my college, like most colleges, we could not have many students fail because it was all part of the “retention and achievement” goal of the college set by the government to meet various standards, and more importantly, tied to funding. Rokhiyah (2015), in her PhD dissertation, sums this up best when she reflects:

When I was a teacher, it was as though I was blindfolded by the curriculum objectives — the targets that I had to achieve since the schools and society demanded me to help pupils achieve their academic goals.

(p.19)

Another reason no such questioning occurs is because most of us are not educated in our formal schooling in relation to the art of questioning, as Postman (1995) contends. Through the process we call schooling, “all the answers given to students are the end products of questions” (p.172). Postman argues that “everything we know has its origins in questions” and questions “are the principal intellectual instruments available to human beings” (p.173). He poses a key critical question: “how is it possible that no more than one in one hundred students has ever been exposed to an extended and systematic

study of the art and science of question-asking?” (p.173). Now, that is a really good question. Postman also had two other important questions that raise the stakes and challenge fellow educators:

How come Alan Bloom didn't mention this, or E.D. Hirsch, Jr., or so many others who have written books on how to improve our schools? Did they simply fail to notice that *the principal intellectual instrument available to human beings is not examined in school?*

(p.173)

In 'The Closing of the American Mind,' Bloom (2012) delivers a searing critique of education generally, but very specifically in relation to the U.S. higher education, with universities as his main target. He provides much needed insight with all that was, and still is, wrong with U.S. higher education system. Although Bloom uses questions throughout his book, he falls short of questioning the origin of questions. The same can be said of Hirsch, Jr's (1988) book "*Cultural Literacy; What Every America Needs to Know.*" He offers some interesting content, with 63 pages (pp.152-215) worth of lists that he believes are important for every American to know. In response to criticism, he later moved from the notion of "Cultural Literacy" to "Core Knowledge" (Buras 1995 p.12), but still missed the opportunity to question the origins of questions or words.

I was one of those 99 students in a hundred who never thought for one minute to question the most obvious things in life, such as education, teaching, democracy, patriotism. It never occurred to me to ask questions such as "What is a school?" Or, on a very personal level, "What is love?" Questioning of such concepts seemed to be out of bounds, simply because definitions of such things were just taken for granted and, as Robinson said, what is taken for granted does not get questioned. More importantly, I felt ridiculous posing such questions, because the answers seemed so obvious. Therein lay the problem. For example, if I was asked the question "What is a school?" I would have said, "It's obvious, a school is a building where children go to learn." I would have then refined that in light of my own personal experience to "a building or a place where children go to learn." And, as for love, my answer years ago was, "It's obvious, everybody knows what love is!" These were honest answers, no matter how insufficient they now seem. An inherent part of the problem here is what Postman highlights in relation to definitions. He raises the question of how definitions come to be and the role

they play in schooling at every level, by asking exactly the same question with a subtle yet very important distinction, in his masterful critique of education:

In an effort to clear up confusion (or ignorance) about the meaning of a word, does anyone ask, What is a definition of this word? Just about always, the way of putting the question is, What is *the* definition of this word? The difference between *a* and *the* in this context is vast, and I have no choice but to blame the schools for the mischief created by an inadequate understanding of what a definition is.

(Postman 1995, p. 172).

For most of my career, I was certainly guilty of using ‘the’ instead of ‘a’ in my asking students questions in class and in their assessments. Furthermore, I personally did not question where definitions came from, and at best regurgitated the consult of the nearest decent dictionary. I did not question what was written in the dictionary and it never entered my head that the dictionary was once written by a person. Oxford or Chambers of Cambridge, the two dictionaries that I used most, did not feel they came from the pen of a person, but the esteemed authority of the most prodigious when seeking to find out what a word or a concept meant. Who was I to argue with the dictionary that had “156 years of continuous experience behind it, from the days when popular educational publishing took in Britain” (Chambers 1988, p. vii)? This was the dictionary that assisted me through my master’s degree, well before the internet and the links to Dictionary.com were at our fingertips. I always advised my students, like the rest in our college, to consult the smaller Oxford dictionary that was available to them by the scores. However, my 1793-page Chambers always allowed me to stay ahead of the students when neither understood a term, definition or concept. In fact, I always carried a tiny pocket-sized *Oxford Dictionary* and a *Collins Gem Thesaurus* in my work briefcase for the same purpose. Such is the power of the official source.

Before Chambers, I relied on my own copy of the ‘*Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English*’ edited by A.S Hornby (1974). This was the dictionary that combined “the traditions of the Oxford Dictionaries with the language teaching skills of A. S. Hornby” (p. vii). It was also a dictionary for those who wanted to “develop further” their knowledge of “how English words, compounds, and idiomatic expressions are used, *what they mean*, [Emphasis added] how they are pronounced, and how they are spelt” (p. xiii). At the time I bought this dictionary in 1976, I had no idea what ‘compounds and idiomatic expressions’ were, but the promise to reveal, “what they mean” was enough to

tell me that this purchase would be my savior, the help needed to get through my college years, to learn what certain words meant. I was going to understand what they officially meant, because it came from the official source, the dictionary. I took this official source seriously because as A.S Hornby said, back in the seventies, “This is a dictionary of the English Language as it is written and spoken today by educated British men and women” (p. xiii). Who was I to argue with the ‘educated men and women’ of the great nation of Britain?

Postman highlights a powerful reality that confirms my experience of going through all my formal schooling without ever questioning where definitions came from or that they were indeed once written by someone, who had decided what was meant by their definition. Postman goes on to further illustrate in practical terms how this unquestioning of definitions plays out in virtually all schools:

From the earliest grade through graduate school, students are given definitions and, with few exceptions, are not told whose definitions they are, for what purposes they were invented, and what alternative definitions might serve equally as well. The result is that students come to believe that definitions are *not* invented; that they are not even human creations; that, in fact, they are – how shall I say it? - part of the natural world, like clouds, trees, and stars.

(p.172)

Thankfully, I no longer need Postman or anyone else to confirm how real the above statement is and how it actually plays out in most schools, colleges, universities and other learning institutions. I reflect on my own experience to confirm Postman’s statement that “In a thousand examinations on scores of subjects, students are asked to give definitions of hundreds of things, words, concepts, procedures” and this is done with little discussion of “what a definition is” (p.172). During my teaching years, I put countless students through such examinations and tests without ever discussing where a definition came from. Likewise, teachers in my formal schooling did the same with me. It is no wonder that in all my years as a professional educator, I did not question what education was.

So, I had to ask myself: if I cannot answer what is education, then how can I say what an educated person is? Now I had two questions, closely related and equally difficult to answer. These two questions, although never formulated until recently, have

their roots in another question that had been bouncing around in my head for around 34 years. That question is: “Why do highly educated people (mainly men) do such dumb things?” This question emerged during June 1984 after listening to Bruce Springsteen’s song “Born in the U.S.A.” and I could not understand why officials in power had sent people like the protagonist in the song to fight in Vietnam. Why officers and generals in the U.S. military allowed soldiers under their command to commit such atrocities that blatantly ignored internationally established rules and laws of war? Why highly educated officials constructed and promoted such lies about that war? Then, why such officials in the U.S. government failed to deal with such pressing needs of so many of the veterans of the Vietnam war? This was all a mystery to me. I had often wondered why and how some highly educated individuals made such, dare I say ‘dumb’ decisions that affected so many people adversely, but I never actually formulated the question until after listening to “Born in the U.S.A.” So, the question of what constitutes an ‘educated person’ became even more relevant, given that people go to school to become ‘educated’ and people like me contributed to some of that ‘educating’ through my various roles in the college system.

I had not struggled with the notion of myself as an ‘educated person,’ as that is what most people saw me to be, initially as a teacher and later with a master’s degree, holding senior professional positions. However, I realized through the song “Born in the U.S.A.” how little I actually knew of the world I lived in. Sure, I had credentials that gave me some authority in the professional sense, but after seeing all that I saw through the lens of Vietnam, I realized that all the learning that was really meaningful to me, that I was drawn to and enjoyed, I was doing outside of and without the help of any educational institution. I began to see how valid and valuable learning could be without educational courses, trained teachers and curricula. Yet, as a professional teacher, I was doing quite the opposite. Thinking back now, I must have subconsciously questioned the idea of what education is and how do we get educated. However, the actual question never got formulated and therefore never passed my lips until the opportunity to reflect, to dig deep, sit with the uncomfortable and painful realisation of my own failures as an educator, was afforded in the course of my PhD studies.

5.2. *The Educated*

Trying to answer the question ‘what is education?’ is a bit like Collinwood (1958) trying to answer, “What is art?” (p.1). It would take a whole book, and still there would be contestation. For education, there are easily available descriptions of what some view education to be, such as the list of forty quotes compiled and appropriately titled *What is Education? Insights from the World’s Greatest Minds* (Price-Mitchel 2014). The same goes for the notion of what is an educated person, as the The B.C. Ministry of Education’s definition once revealed (B.C.T.F. 1987) and can be seen in full in Appendix B. Such efforts provide useful insights, but often fall short of providing a thorough understanding. Furthermore, Bloom (2012) argues that this is a waste of time, as “there is no vision, nor is there a set of competing visions, of what an educated human being is” (p. 337). The field of education has a long and complex history. Curtis and Boulwood (1966) provide a thorough overview of the various approaches to education, from before Plato to the early twentieth century. Any meaningful insight into education instantly reveals that it is a “complex and contentious notion” (Barrow, 1984, p. 34), and that “experts on schooling” (p. 80) have different views on it. This is complicated by the competing demands and expectations from government, business, industry, community, parents and students. Virtually everyone has a view of education or an opinion of what education is. Despite volumes written by academics and the plenitude of public opinions, I only recently realized the real difficulty in trying to answer the question “what is education?”

Trying to gain insight into what education is by exploring the etymological meaning of the word is somewhat helpful, but limiting, if not outright confusing. It is commonly accepted that the word ‘education’ has its roots in and is derived from the Latin ‘educere,’ which means ‘to lead out.’ Halifax (1999) claims the word ‘education’ means “to be led out of ignorance into knowing and knowledge” (p.173). Postman and Weingartner (1969) maintain “The word ‘educate’ is closely related to the word ‘educere.’ In the oldest pedagogic sense of the term, this meant drawing out of a person something potential or latent” (p. 62). Peters (1977) states: “The Latin word ‘educare’ was usually, though not always, used of physical development. In Silver Latin ‘educare’ was used of the rearing of plants and animals as well as children” (p. 9). Barrow and Woods (2006) add further complexity by reminding us that this is not so straight forward, as there was

“considerable controversy” around the origins of the word ‘education’ (p. 115). They highlight that the “Romans used both ‘educere’ and ‘educare’ with reference to educating children,” and that ‘educere’ was used to mean ‘to train’, whilst “educare, besides meaning to train, was used to mean to nourish with reference to plants”. The difference is considerable, as exemplified in action, when the “teacher was to regard himself as a gardener tending a plant” (p.115), rather than as a craftsman making a product. One approach allows a student to flourish naturally, while the other is “moulding or deliberately forming any aspects of the child’s personality... [which] ... in fact is not education at all” (p. 116). If this is the case, then what was I doing for all those years as a teacher? This was a painful realization that my life’s work up to that point was not education at all. Where could I go from there?

Encouraged and intrigued by the possibilities in finding new meaning by examining the lived experience and through this lens, I set out to explore other ‘basic’ concepts I had taken for granted. One such word and concept is love. Like ‘education’, the word or concept of ‘love’ has so many different meanings, from the declarative ‘I love you’ to the various kinds of love, such as that of a mother’s love for her children, to her love of her partner, her sister, brothers, her own parents and so on. In all these situations, the type of love being expressed will be different. Further complications arise when the word and concept of love is used and referred to in completely different ways, such as the ‘love of’ money, gold, cars, golf, music, nature and so on. The list is endless. Fromme (1965) contends that “2000 years of writing on the subject [of love] have failed to come up with answers” of what love actually is (p.10). He observes:

It is far easier to tell stories about love, to savor love in one or another artistic form, to muse and dream about love than actually to answer the searching questions we all raise about love.

(1965, p.1)

bell hooks (2003) adds: “The truth is, far too many people in our culture do not know what love is” (p. 11). Love, it seems, is a ‘mysterious subject’ (Peck 1978, p.180) that everyone thinks they understand, yet, if you ask them to define it accurately, you witness the instant difficulty. Peters’ warning (1966) that it is hard to “pin down the concept of ‘love’” (p.23) reads like an invitation to further study, some of which started as a ‘detour’ during this work, to shed light on the intersectionality of art, music, love and education.

Like 'love,' the word 'education' has what Peters calls 'normative' qualities, whereby there is a common acceptance of the word in its everyday usage. A careful examination reveals that it represents a very complex phenomenon. 'Education' is used to describe so many different things, and as a result ends up being different things to different people. Yet, we manage to have a 'common understanding' an understanding that, once pressed, is very difficult to pinpoint. While we may be able to get by without a firm understanding of 'love,' we must have a better idea of what education means because without that, we cannot really be effective in what we profess to be and do as educators. We must also have a better idea of how a 'well educated person' manifests. Thankfully, I am not alone in this quest. Barrow and Woods (2006) raise similar concerns:

If you cannot give an account of what you mean by a 'well educated person', then we can make no sense of any claim you go on to make about education, such as that it matters, that it is well provided or that good teachers should proceed this way rather than that way.

(p.11)

Generally speaking, an educated person is normally referred to as someone who has attended college or university and earned certain credentials, such as a degree or a higher diploma. The higher the degree or diploma, the more the 'educated' label is generally attached. Barrow and Woods (2006) separate the acquiring of qualifications and academic achievement from being 'well educated.' They also separate emotional development from what they call 'the business of educating' (p.11). One of the key characteristics of education for Barrow (1984, p. 34) is essentially about 'developing mind'; he suggests that only humans can be educated, while animals can only be trained. He believes that the "distinctive ability of humans is at the core of the possibility of being educated" (2006, p.22). Furthermore, education itself plays a key role, as it is the only means through which we "develop our unique reasoning capacity, hence our minds, hence our essential humanity, and hence our autonomy" (2006, p.25). This was highlighted by Kant, who saw humans as the only creatures who need education, while "animals are provided with instincts and therefore do not require a formal process of education" (Curtis & Boulwood, 1966, p. 290). So, what does a developed mind look like?

According to Barrow (1984), a developed mind is one that has acquired 'knowledge and understanding' and one that has 'an awareness of one's own society and its place in time and space' (p.88). This awareness of one's society is also key to Whitehead (1967), who believed that one of the aims of education is to "produce men who possess both culture and expert knowledge" (p. 1). In turn, this "expert knowledge around culture will lead them as deep as philosophy and as high as art" (p. 1). Therefore, one could conclude that an educated person should be well versed in their own culture and, I would add, be open to the culture(s) of others, so as not to be ignorant. Barrow argues that 'ignorance is not a quality of an educated mind' (1984, p. 86). The hallmarks of an educated person should include awareness, information and knowledge.

Since an educated person will have acquired knowledge and understanding, could it be also viewed that such a person should be well informed? Whilst this could be the case, an educated mind should not know everything, since being educated is not the same as having 'encyclopedic knowledge' (Barrow 1984, p. 88). As Peters (1966) reinforces, "We would not call a man who was merely well informed an educated man" (p. 12). Whitehead went further, declaring that "a merely well-informed man is the most useless bore on God's earth" (1967, p. 1). He accepted that education should provide 'intellectual knowledge,' and more:

There is another ingredient, vaguer but greater, and more dominating in its importance. The ancients called it "wisdom". You cannot be wise without some basis of knowledge; but you may easily acquire knowledge and remain bare of wisdom.

(p. 30)

The critical point that Whitehead made in relation to wisdom is that it cannot be gained from schooling. He observed that "knowledge shrinks as wisdom grows" (p. 37).

A key element missing from these eminent thinkers is highlighted by Jane Roland Martin (1994), who notes that the fundamental problem of defining an educated person in this manner is that it is viewed from a male perspective that "coincides with our cultural stereotypes of a male human being" (p.75). The main challenge she sees is that: "the intellectual disciplines into which a person must be initiated to become an educated person *exclude* women and their works, *construct* the female to the male image of her

and deny the truly feminine qualities she does possess” (p. 74). Such an approach makes it difficult to include qualities like “feelings and emotions such as caring and compassion, or skills of cooperation and nurturance” (p.79). In addition, the link between knowledge and being educated is also somewhat problematic. Illich (1971) argues that an educated person is one that has not been schooled because “school has an antieducational effect on society” (p.11) and that the “pupil is schooled to confuse teaching with learning, grade advancement with education” (p.1). For Barrow (1984), the educated person is able to understand rather than just know:

The mark of the educated mind lies in being able to disentangle complex problems and being able to recognize different kinds of questions for what they are. Uneducated minds oversimplify and confuse logically distinct issues. Precocious or pedantic minds, by contrast, overcomplicate. But the educated mind observes due proportion.

(p. 35)

As a result, we should expect educated people to demonstrate the ability to think critically and to “show the same kind of fine, discriminating, coherent reasoning in thinking about matters generally” (p.35).

Paulo Freire contributed valuable insight into what it means to be educated. He questioned whether being educated in the Western world is the same as being educated in other parts of the world, through ‘dialogical encounters that allow “each individual [to win] back the right to *say his or her own word, to name the world*” (1996, p.15). When, as a result, a peasant says, “I now realize I am a person, *an educated person*” [emphasis added] (p.15), we wonder: is that the same as, say, the formally educated graduate from Harvard? When the illiterate peasant comments “we were blind, now our eyes have been opened” (p.15), is that the same as our Western concept of ‘educere’, meaning they were led out of ignorance? Whilst Freire maintains that training and socialization seem proper and desirable functions of schooling, he maintains that there is “no such thing as a *neutral* educational process” (p. 16), as all education is political. Hampton (1995) observes the central role of teachers: “the educator who sees education as culturally neutral is like the spouse of an alcoholic in denial” (p.32). Education for Indigenous populations in North America is a poignant case and point: what is valued in one culture (Indigenous) may not be valued or as valued in another (settler), and as a

result we have a system of 'education of' rather than 'education by Indigenous communities,' with well documented tragic consequences.

Through efforts to understand what it means to be educated, we must learn to ask key questions that at least point us "in the right direction" (Barrow and Woods 2006, p. 36). It is worth noting that "the notion of being 'educated' as characterising the all-round development of a person morally, intellectually, and spiritually only emerged in the nineteenth century" (Peters 1977, p.10). Up to that point, the term referred "to the rearing and bringing up of children and animals, as well as instruction that went on in schools" (p. 11), firmly aligned with the concept of 'educere' described earlier. I believe that Aoki (1988) provides one of the best definitions of the educated person, who¹⁸:

first and foremost, understands that one's ways of knowing, thinking, and doing flow from who one is. Such a person knows that an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto oneself, but is a being-in-relation-with-others, and hence is, at core an ethical being.

A person may not necessarily become educated through the professional role of schools, colleges and universities, and that there is a clear distinction between education and schooling. Formal education, with its certificates, diplomas and degrees of various kinds and levels also provides the commonly accepted measure of how much a person is educated. However, we know that we also get educated from many sources outside of school, best summarized by Lynch (1987, p.39) in his circular diagram featuring virtually everything from a person's 'biological apparatus' to 'parents' and 'peers,' and the 'environmental factors' at large. Add to it Marshal McLuhan's (1967) take that in the sixties and seventies the television was the greatest teacher, teaching all the time, and doing more teaching than schools of all levels. Although that may still hold true to a certain extent, Tapscott (2009) and Prensky (2001) update this to account for the amount of learning that is now done via digital format and the Internet. Even though education has gone through what Aoki calls the "three waves of technological thrusts" (Pinar & Irwin 2005 p. 151 and pp. 235-236) - that of the educational media instruments such as the overhead projector, the film and slide projector, then the television and finally, the computer - it is fair to say that schools are still the places where people go to get educated and that this is a generally accepted view in society.

¹⁸ The full citation can be seen in Appendix B

Chapter 6. Power of Song

6.1. The Lunch Break

It was a bright summer's morning, like you could rarely predict in England but were grateful to have, given the capricious weather that usually shrouds this tiny yet most powerful of islands. Monday, June 4th, 1984 was the official release date of the album *Born in the U.S.A.* by Bruce Springsteen. I was five months and nineteen days into my first full time position as a Lecturer at a college of further education in rural South Yorkshire, set in a small coal mining village. The college was right in the middle of the village, in a completely 'white' area and could have so easily fit into the category of schools that Chris Gaine (1988) in his book *No Problem Here* spoke of when he described schools in mainly white areas perceiving themselves as having no racial problem because they had no black or ethnic minority students. It was a parochial kind of place, where it seemed to me that directly or indirectly everybody knew each other. I had moved there from Leicester, a major city some 70 miles south of Sheffield, and 100 miles north of London. Most students of the college had not travelled that far south at the time. And London, the capital of England, was just too far for most of them to ever venture.

In 1984, most of the college offered training programmes for youth (16 to 19 years old), such as the Youth Training Scheme (commonly known as YTS) and retraining for adults left unemployed by the closure of 'steelworks' in the closest town of Rotherham, and the larger city of Sheffield. Gone were many of the factories that had made this city world famous for its stainless steel, and the few that still survived were all but waiting to be closed, bought or taken over. Such was the local economy of this British town, and many others throughout the U.K. We were 5 years into the Thatcher government and already witnessed the inner-city riots of 1981, which had shaken the country and were just at the start of the miners' strike that would ultimately change the course of politics and the effectiveness of the unions in the U.K.

My focus on that Monday, June 4th, 1984 should have been the classes I was teaching, as that was my job at the start of my career, and the routine of every start of the week. However, not that day, not that Monday. That Monday, from the moment I woke up to the moment I got to my first class at 9:00 a.m., my focus was elsewhere. My

attention centred around the lunchtime hour, more specifically from 12:15 p.m. to 1:15 p.m. My focus of that day was to drive the 6 miles or so to Rotherham town and lay my hands on the newly released album available for sale at 9:00 a.m. that morning. Had I had not had a class to teach in the morning, I would have been one of the first customers at that record store. Compact discs, or as they are commonly known as CDs were just beginning to compete with vinyl records and I had yet to purchase my first CD player. That took care of the dilemma of choosing whether to buy the record or the better-quality CD. Plus, there was the familiar anticipation of opening the record sleeve to view how the artist or the record company had packaged the new material of songs.

During the first tea break of the day at 10:15 a.m., I called to the record shop I was going to 'fly' to, ensuring they had copies of the album in question and to obtain directions to the actual shop in the center of Rotherham, a town I had hardly frequented. But on this day, I had to visit it and I could not afford to get lost, as I only had one hour between classes. My objective was to make sure I had the album to listen to that day and that evening, as it was going to be my entertainment for the night, and I could not wait!

As soon as my class finished at 12:15 p.m., I paced hurriedly towards the car park instead of taking my usual route to the canteen. This was not the day for familiar college food. This was the day to feed the musical hunger that had been waiting for nearly two years, a hunger that had begun 3 years prior at a live concert, where popular music changed from being just entertainment to generating curiosity to learn, and to become a resource of the most unusual kind. This was something I had only experienced twice before, but had failed to recognise. It had been nearly 20 months since Bruce Springsteen had released the album 'Nebraska', which had been critically received and is now generally regarded as a ground-breaking classic, and from which *Born in the U.S.A.* emerged.

That Monday was all about the new release, which was featured on the popular BBC Radio One, which of course I missed by being in class in the morning. BBC Radio One was the premier radio station for popular music in the U.K. It started on September 1967 and reached its peak in the 1970's and '80s,' with an audience of up to 24 million, of which I was one regular listener. Anyway, I rushed out of the car park and I am sure that rigidly sticking to the speed limit was not at the forefront of my mind. How can this

be? How can it be that a release of an album by an artist hardly known in the U.K., as he had no number one hit singles, no top ten hit singles, and not even a top twenty hit single to his name was driving me to do this? This I could not explain adequately at the time and maybe not even fully today, but I will try.

I got to the town centre of Rotherham and quickly found a parking spot and rushed to the record store. Thankfully, there was no major rush to speak of and I handed over the sum of nearly £5.00 of my hard-earned money in exchange for the new record. At last, the album was in my hands and a certain amount of relief entered my being as I headed back to my car, slightly less rushed compared to 15 minutes earlier when I was racing in the opposite direction.

At last, I had collected the newly released album with its now widely regarded iconic cover showing what appears to be a male figure standing with his back towards the camera with a baseball cap drooping from his rear right pocket of slightly worn out jeans, against the backdrop of red and white horizontal stripes that resemble part of the national flag of the U.S.A. Draper (2015) claims that the “slack denim jeans and cap lazily thrown in the back pocket still proved Springsteen to be the voice of the common people” (p.218). This cover went on to create its own controversy, as some viewed Springsteen as “pissing on the flag” (Loder 1984), something that Springsteen dismissed: “No no that was unintentional. We took a lot of different types of pictures, and in the end, the picture of my ass looked better than the picture of my face, so that went on the cover” (Springsteen 1984). Max Weinberg, Springsteen’s drummer confirmed this, explaining that he voted for the picture that ended up as the album cover because that is what he sees when he plays the drums in concerts (Weinberg 1986). Regardless, with the new record tightly grasped in my hand, I got to my car with just enough time to get back home to play a track or two before rushing back to college for the afternoon class. The act of consuming some lunch was not even on my radar that day. How strange was this? After all, this was not a crisis that needed to be averted or dealt with, but it felt just as important to me. Why? Well that is something that I am just figuring out many, many years later.

I was just a minute or two into the journey out of the town centre heading home when the Radio One DJ Gary Davis¹⁹ announced the first play of the title track of the new album from Bruce Springsteen. This was a familiar strategy of the radio shows: to be the 'exclusive' DJ, show or station to be the 'first' to play something new. On hearing this, I excitedly turned the radio volume up and on this occasion, I could not believe my ears!

The intensity of sound that blasted out from the dashboard of my car was very powerful and overwhelming. A sound of someone angry and almost shouting at the top of their lungs, with the music to match. I struggled to understand all the verses as I was trying to drive and at the same time concentrate on the barrage of noise that was coming from the speakers, but I had no trouble hearing and understanding the chorus of someone needing to be heard and recognized for being "Born in the U.S.A." The rest of the song did not seem to make much sense on this first hearing through the airwaves, but then again, this was not the time to understand the song fully. I needed to get home and hear it properly, and that was at least 15 minutes away. What a coincidence this was, I thought, that I just picked up the record and within minutes the title track came on the radio. I still had a few miles of the lunchtime journey left and I could not wait to get home to play the very track that had just bombarded my ears. Only this time, it would be with the lyrics in front of me, so I could find out what all this overwhelming sound was about.

The opportunity to park up in the driveway of my residence could not come quick enough and when I eventually got home, it did not take me long to jump out of the car and make my way straight to the living room, where the hi-fi stereo system lay waiting to be switched on and do its thing, albeit unusually at lunchtime on a school day. After a quick look at the record cover front and back, I carefully removed the cellophane that protected it and removed the inner sleeve that housed the actual vinyl record, a practice that got lost during the CD takeover and later in the digital era of all new popular music.²⁰ It was a weird experience to try and describe, this anticipation and excitement that was worth giving up lunch to drive across town, only to get to this point of putting the needle

¹⁹ Gary Davis used to do what was called the 'Bit in the Middle,' referring to the time slot that ended the morning and went into the afternoon.

²⁰ Although there are indications that the vinyl LP is making a comeback and is "Poised to outsell CDs for the first time since 1986" (Leight 2019).

to the record. But that moment had finally arrived! After placing the newly bought record on the delicate turntable with the care of a fine jewelry maker and hearing the few crackles that vinyl was famous for, something that the CD and now digital technology has wiped out, the introductory first few bars of the song blasted through the hi-fi stack speakers. It was the middle of the day; the volume was up and I did not worry too much about disturbing the neighbors.

That now famous snare drum beat, so powerful alongside the keyboard piano riff accompaniment immediately hit me, pinned me back into the chair and shook me. This song in its opening seconds did, and still does to this day, 35 years later, what certain pieces of music do: it makes the hairs on the back of my neck stand and send an unexplainable type of shiver down my spine. It was the first time in my life that I understood and experienced first-hand what people mean when they say “that sent shivers down my spine” in reference to something that profoundly moved them. So powerful was this effect that that I was immediately and momentarily lost in whatever the song was about. My visceral reaction was the start of my embodied learning that I had yet to become familiar with. All this, before any vocals were uttered or the first verse was even sung. Sounds crazy, right? But it was as real as anything I have seen or heard to this day.

Then, it happened. After a few bars of just that powerful snare drum and keyboard riff, in came the vocals of the first verse. Out of the speakers and straight into my ears and heart, came a fierce, stern, angry, loud, austere and unrelenting, almost a shouting cry demanding to be heard. That demand was instantly met by me as I could do nothing else but listen. It was nearly 1.00 p.m. and I had 15 minutes before I had to be in class in front of students, and I had yet to hear the first verse of the first song, the title track of the album. With the lyric sheet in my hand and ears pinned back by the power of the music, I quickly caught up on the opening line of the first verse and focused thereafter on what was being sung:

Born down in a dead man's town
The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
End up like a dog that's being beat too much
Til you spend half your life just covering up

(Springsteen 1984)

It felt like the first verse almost ripped through the speakers, with the vocals closely resembling shouting, the protagonist filled with anguish and exasperation, making me focus on the lyrics that accompanied the album.²¹

The first verse had me thinking deeply and very quickly in between the minor break between the end of the first chorus and the second verse. At some mega random speed, as thoughts often go through our heads, I was wondering what was this all about? The first verse I mean. What was a 'dead man's town?' What was the 'first kick' and where or who did that 'kick' come from? What did he mean by 'end up like a dog that's been beaten too much'? How and why could that be? Beaten by who? Then, having to 'spend half your life' not simply 'covering up,' but with the added 'just' covering up. Did the extra emphasis, the addition of 'just' before 'covering' mean something more? Did it not?

These were just a few questions that shot through my mind in the few seconds it took for the first verse to end. It is funny how quickly sometimes the brain processes thoughts, almost at the speed of light, it seems. With thoughts flashing through so fast, it makes it feel like all other modes of communication are inadequate. Some of the answers were to come in the verses ahead, with the accompanying music. Although I was just seconds into my first proper hearing without the distraction of driving, I could see the lead character in the song reflecting on his past to understand where and how he got to his present situation and its predicament, similar to reflection I was to do later about certain events in my life and my own lived experience. That predicament would be revealed before the final bars of the song faded into my existence, forever as it happened. Only on that lunch break of Monday, June 4th, 1984, I did not know what the everlasting effect of this particular song would be. As the first verse ended, in came the thunderous chorus:

Born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
I was born in the U.S.A.
Born in the U.S.A.

²¹ A practice Springsteen has maintained with every release since 1973 to ensure that there is no ambiguity in what is being sung. That of course, does not mean that this would not be misinterpreted. "Born in the U.S.A." is generally regarded as the most misinterpreted song since Irving Berlin's "God Bless America."

It appeared to be pleading, almost crying and dripping with emotion, yet filled with enormous pride, making the statement that he, the main protagonist, was *Born in the U.S.A.* He adds 'I' immediately, and repeats it, just on the off chance that it was not heard or clear the first time, in a tone and manner so loud, it verged on shouting. It was immediately clear to me that this character was very proud of being born in the United States of America.²² In fact, he was so proud that everyone near and far needed to hear and understand his declaration. So raw was the passion, that this particular plea could not be ignored. Or could it? It certainly was not ignored by me. I heard it loud and clear, and just as it was intended.

This chorus has an interesting and mostly overlooked structure that represents the increasing build-up of the central message of being born in the U.S.A. The first time the chorus is heard, hard on the heels of the first verse, the once repeated line of "I was born in the U.S.A." is sandwiched between the opening and closing statement of the first and last line of the chorus, which is a straight and simple statement: "Born in the U.S.A." The second time the chorus is heard, predictably after the second verse, the intensity of the cry and passion increase with one more repeat of the previous middle lines of 'I was born in the U.S.A.,' but still sandwiched between the opening and closing statement of 'Born in the U.S.A.' The next time the chorus is heard is not after the third verse, as one would normally expect, but after the last three verses sang one after another.

Somewhat unusual for a 'pop' song, there appears to be no time for the chorus between the third, fourth and the final fifth verse. This time, the last time for the chorus, the statement of "Born in the U.S.A." is repeated 5 times with "I was born in the U.S.A." being declared only once, and then replaced with the protagonist stating "I'm a long gone Daddy in the U.S.A." The same line ends the song with the addition of "I'm a cool rocking [emphasis added] Daddy in the U.S.A." This is the parting shot of the protagonist who then allows the music to say the rest, but not before the chaos of Vietnam and war is represented by frantic drumming with background shouting, and then returning to the melody to fade to coda and into my being. It is this point that Springsteen himself explained to David Hepworth (Springsteen 1986) of BBC 2's, *The Whistle Test* program: "the guy in the song was just glad to be alive, he survived." The change to 'long gone

²² It is with this declaration that the notion of patriotism enters the song and for many confused the message of the song entirely as we shall see later.

Daddy' and 'cool rocking Daddy' with the capital 'D' seems to emphasize that he is still the Daddy and he is back in the country he was born in, proud to be a part of, the country he was prepared to die for.

As the second verse hit my ears, I was already on the lyrics and reading the lines, so that I could make sense of that first verse and its relation to the chorus. Of course, I was expecting the second verse to follow on from the first and continue the story, as that is how most popular songs flow. However, songs are not always presented like that. After all, the popular song has about 3 and half minutes to tell the story. Unlike a novel or movie, it does not have the luxury of additional words or extended time, so jumps and leaps must be made to carry the listener to the next piece of the story. This song was no exception, in that after the first verse, you see the character move from his 'dead man's town' to Vietnam and straight into the chaos and confusion and the 'fog of war' as was later described by the then U.S. Secretary of State for Defence, Robert McNamara (2003), one of the main architects of that war. The fighting was in a country as far away as it is possible to imagine from his birth place, the "dead man's town" in the U.S.A.

The second verse, unusually short for a pop song with its only two lines, starts off with: "Got in a little hometown jam," implying that the protagonist got into some kind of trouble, but gives no details. It appears that joining the military was a way out of the 'jam.' However, what our protagonist did not bargain for was that 'they' (whoever that is?) would actually send him off to a 'foreign land' and make him use his rifle in a real-life combat situation. That combat would involve killing other human beings, made to be viewed as different for their skin colour, or as Springsteen summarizes: "to kill the yellow man."

Up to this point in the song there is no mention of Vietnam the country or the Vietnam war, but the reference to the 'yellow man' clearly suggests both. As I first listened to the song, all I understood was that an individual born in the U.S.A had joined the military and was fighting in a foreign land, and that the armed conflict was between America and a far east country, as it was common to hear references to the Chinese, Koreans, Taiwanese, Vietnamese and Japanese as being 'yellow' skinned.

However, I was intrigued by the word ‘they’ in this verse, as it seemed to suggest that ‘they,’ whoever they were, were essentially responsible for putting a ‘rifle’ in the hands of the protagonist and later sending him off to a ‘foreign land’ to kill. This was very intriguing, as my reference for the army was from my father’s stories of his twenty-year service in the Indian army under the British rule and the various training exercises, none of which involved killing anyone. The two references I had in relation to Vietnam were: firstly, growing up with the odd news coverage of the Vietnam war on TV in the early 1970s, and secondly, the three major Hollywood films that came out in the late 1970s (*The Deer Hunter*, *Coming Home* and *Apocalypse Now*). However, none of this prior knowledge allowed me to make sense of the song lyric so far, but I did quickly process that ‘they’ could be the military or the government, and the conflict was the Vietnam war, but was not sure, as the listening was happening fast.

Then came the chorus for the second time, with the same ferocity but with additional intensity, with the one more repeat of “I was born in the U.S.A.” The passion of the protagonist of being proud of being born in the U.S.A. and the fact that he is an American is clearly cemented, as if to remove any doubt if there was any, given the way it was sung. After this second onslaught of the chorus, a few bars of music, albeit loud and intense, provided a valuable pause to digest the previous lyrics and the story being told so far. Those few seconds assisted in helping make sense of what was quickly becoming a story of a man turning quickly into a soldier, going into battle overseas, being very patriotic.

At this point in the song, I had no idea what was coming in the next few verses, but could not wait, so I quickly tried to read the third verse and remember only getting to the second line when the vocals caught up with me and I had to redirect my sight to the opening line of the third verse:

Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says "son if it was up to me"
Went down to see my V.A. man
He said "son don't you understand now"

Now the story quickly became complicated, as this was no straightforward vignette. The protagonist is ‘back home’ after doing his tour of duty and serving his country and goes looking for a job at the “refinery.” However, the “Hiring man” saying “if it was up to me”

suggests that it was out his hands to offer a job to the returning veteran. I quickly thought “that’s interesting, why would the hiring man say that?” Then the third line hit me, and that interest intensified as the veteran “Went down to see” his ‘V.A. man.’ “What was a ‘V.A. man?” I asked myself before the fourth line descended on me.

With no luck finding a job at the refinery, the veteran goes to see his ‘V.A. man,’ who introduces a cold hard truth by asking the question “Son don’t you understand now.” Vietnam veterans were not employable and he (the veteran) is expected to understand and accept that reality. At this point I did not know what a ‘V.A. man’ was, nor did I understand the difficulty most Vietnam veterans had in securing a job after their return home from war. There was no familiar experience of any returning veterans in England at the time, although as discussed later, there were some similarities with the returning veterans from the Falklands in 1982 and even more so, those returning from Iraq in 1991, and then Afghanistan and Iraq years later. The reality of a veteran’s experience of trying to find a job was clearly painted in these four lines of the third verse. It is uncanny how just four lines of a verse from a song can so clearly paint such a vivid picture and help you understand something that vast explanations often fail to do. Here was an example of how the arts penetrate deep into the human mind and heart in a way other forms fail to reach and teach. Credit may be given to the beauty of poetry, although this song would not necessarily be recognized as being the most poetic of texts. Nevertheless, it made me realize what the veteran experience in relation to jobs was like for many returning to their homeland.

No sooner had I made sense of this third verse that the fourth verse roared out, revealing that the protagonist had to deal with many other issues and consequences of the Vietnam war. Firstly, his brother, who had also served in Vietnam, died there fighting, yet the enemy was still very much alive. The verse also tells another side of the Vietnam war, where his brother fell in love with a woman from Saigon, with the proof of a picture of him “in her arms.” At this point, I vaguely recalled some images showing the experience of a few Vietnam veterans as it was portrayed by Hollywood in movies that came out around four years after the official end of the American involvement in Vietnam²³. However, none of the movie images were seared into my memory like the

²³ President Gerald Ford had signed the declaration in 1975 ending the ten year plus war as captured in the iconic photograph by David Kennerly, The White House photographer 1974-77 (Upshal 1995).

images I envisioned when I read and heard this verse. Also highlighted in this verse was the Viet Cong. I vaguely remembered that the Viet Cong was presented as the enemy in the movies, but I had no real sense of who they were and why they were fighting the Americans. I also had no idea what “Khe Sahn” was or what role it played in this war. What began to emerge by now is how little I knew about the Vietnam war, but then again, I was in England and why should I know about some war that Americans were involved in thousands of miles away? Aside from some news coverage, there was not a lot of discussion of the Vietnam war in normal day to day life in the U.K. I had no idea that the likes of Richard Branson had been marching with the actress Vanessa Redgrave and the writer Tariq Ali in the sixties in London (Branson 1998). Nevertheless, by its fourth verse, this song changed that. Somehow, the combination of the lyrics and the music that accompanied it, pierced through and embedded themselves right into me like no movies, news or lessons in school ever did. The song so far managed to raise more questions for me about the Vietnam war and the post-war experience of the Vietnam veterans than my entire life had up to that point.

This was some education I was getting in about 3 minutes of a song during my lunch break. Three minutes, and there was still another verse to go and some more lines that looked like the chorus to end the song from the quick scan of the lyric sheet before the final verse kicked in. Then suddenly, the music that had been very powerful to this point suddenly reverted back to the opening bars and the final verse revealed itself in a coarse voice backed by only drums and that opening riff:

Down in the shadow of penitentiary
Out by the gas fires of the refinery

I did not quite understand these two lines and before I had even time to think, the next two lines ended the final verse of this song with a bellowing cry claiming forcefully that he (the protagonist) had ‘nowhere to go and nowhere to run’.

I'm ten years burning down the road
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go

The verse ended here and was immediately followed without missing a beat with an immensely passionate plea-like declaration that he was “Born in the U.S.A.”

Part of the problem for me in understanding this last verse was that I did not know what a “penitentiary” was at the time, as that is not a common term in the U.K. So, this added to the homework already set by some of the lines in the previous verses. However, I made some sense of the “ten years burning down the road” as meaning that after 10 years spent searching there is little to show for it, no hope, nowhere to run to or go. This was followed by the blasting and what seemed like growing in fervour statement of “Born in the U.S.A.” The protagonist was “Born in the U.S.A.” and although the U.S.A. had let him down, he was still proud and patriotic.

It is clear to me now, that the fifth verse refers to the protagonist’s experience of returning home, which reflects the experience of so many other Vietnam veterans. The reference to the ‘penitentiary’ is to let the listener know that many Vietnam veterans ended up in prison. What is also poignant here is that after being home for ten years, this veteran was still trying to find a place he could call his home in the very country he was born in. The lyrics end by the protagonist stating he’s a “cool rocking Daddy in the U.S.A.,” but that is not the end of the song, as I learnt.

At this point, I was about to skip to the next track because my lunch hour was fast running out of time, with only about ten minutes or so remaining. Luckily, I was only about four minutes walking distance from college and felt I had about six to seven minutes left to hear another couple of tracks. Or so I thought! This song, so powerful in its music and lyrics had ended lyrically and at this stage in the recording of most popular songs the music would be used to simply fade away to the silence that awaits the next track, but this was no ordinary popular song. The minute and 30 seconds (almost half of an ordinary pop song) of what follows the final chorus reveals the intensity, confusion and chaos that this war brought. The screams that are vocalized and incorporated into the music culminate and lead up to an outright frenetic drumming (that had not appeared on a Springsteen record before or since for that matter), which to me represented the mayhem of war, where nobody wins, only some people survive.

When the song did eventually fade away to its end after 4 minutes and 40 seconds, I was feeling a little numb, sad, intrigued and excited, all at the same time. This was only the second time I had heard this song and the first time properly without any distraction and with the lyrics in front of me. Still reeling from the onslaught of that opening title track of the album, I quickly listened to the second song and then snippets

of a few others. Time was never so precious and ticked away faster than I recall in those moments. Before I knew it, it was time to head back to work for the afternoon class. What a lunch break this was, like no other before or since, in the thirty-five years that have followed. My body was heading to the afternoon class but my mind was on what had just happened. I was so overwhelmed by the power of the "Born in the U.S.A." song that I could not remember what else I had listened to. I felt very moved and saddened because the content it revealed to me so clearly raised all sorts of questions: questions about government neglecting its own citizens who had been prepared to die for its benefit; the ramifications of the Vietnam war, which I did not understand; the impact on soldiers, on innocent people caught up in the war, on the population at home, on employers. These were just some of the issues going through my mind. The human cost in both countries seemed to be beyond measure. The one question that kept resurfacing was "Why?" Why did this war take place? Why could it not be resolved by other means? Why did the U.S government neglect its veterans? On the other hand, the excitement I remember was in relation to the effect the song had on me the power of the music and the lyrics. I did not have the confidence at that early stage in my teaching career to share what I had just been subjected to, my lived curriculum, with my students in a class where I was about to impart my "curriculum-as-plan" (Aoki 1991), with its "course outline" and "objective understandings" (p.5). Such was the pressure, that nothing could alter the content of my lesson plan and cause it to deviate from the learning objectives I had set. However, in my mind, I could not wait to get back home at the end of the day to play the rest of the album, to see what else was in store. Work on that beautiful summer Monday could not finish soon enough.

I managed to get through the day with the excitement of a teenager on his first real important date. I was more than looking forward to the evening, to my date with the record player. I rushed home at 5:00 p.m like I had never done before, and could barely contain my excitement. I made myself a good old cup of English tea (not 'cha', as I had long abandoned that practice) and went straight into the front room to meet the record player for the second time in under five hours. Dinner just had to wait on this particular day. After all, it had been about 2 years since I had heard new recordings from the man they called "the Boss." Yes, this was no ordinary Monday evening, and nothing was going to interrupt me. I was going to hear the whole album with headphones on, start to finish, then worry about such mundane things like dinner. Perhaps this was strange

behaviour for a young professional, up and coming post-secondary lecturer, but never mind.

The same excitement from lunchtime gripped me as I pulled the record out of its sleeve for the second time and nervously placed it on the turn table, then gently lowered the needle to play. Was I going to feel the same as I did about five and a half hours ago? I found out in a matter of seconds. As soon as the crackles, accentuated by listening with headphones, disappeared in the first few seconds, and that snare drum hit with its keyboard accompaniment, the hairs on the back of my neck stood to attention and a shiver went straight down my spine and into the armchair I was sitting in. To say “I was completely blown away” would be an understatement, but to accurately describe what I felt is also impossible. What is it about music that it can sometimes do the unexplainable?

I listened to the whole album before doing anything else that evening. As I have said before, it is strange that nothing else was remotely considered as being important on that Monday in 1984. Why should this be? Why should the release of an album by an artist barely known in the U.K. make me, a perfectly normal young professional in a respectable job, behave this way? That is the rest of this story, because unknown to me at the time, it was the actual start of my real education, or as David Brooks (2009) calls it, the ‘other education.’

6.2. Springsteen

Who knows the mysteries of music? Who knows why music and why some music affects us more than another? How and why “music affects us deeply as it does has been a constant source of speculation from ancient times to present” (Leland 2005, p. 14). I had no idea of this as a young man. My obsession with Bruce Springsteen, and it could be called that and has been by some family and friends, although I see it as something completely different, started in its truest sense in the Spring of 1981. It took place in the most unlikely of places, in what was essentially a large barn-like place set on agricultural grounds in Staffordshire, England, known as Bingley Hall County Showground, on May 20th, 1981. This makeshift concert venue also happened to be the place where I had seen two of my all-time favorite live concerts that I ranked as my number one and number two.

The show that the American band Boston put on at Bingley Hall on October 21, 1979 as part of their *Don't Look Back* tour had ranked as my best concert of all time to that point. That was closely followed by a Fleetwood Mac concert at the same converted barn, complete with my goddess of the time Stevie Nicks, as the band toured their *Tusk* album, the impossible follow-up to their enormously popular *Rumours* album that had topped the US Billboard charts for some thirty weeks and broke all sorts of records. Hepworth (2017) provides an important distinction for this success: "It was the songs of Fleetwood Mac that made them popular. It was the charisma of Stevie Nicks that made them fascinating."²⁴ I had fallen in love with Stevie Nicks immediately as Fleetwood Mac released their single "Dreams" from the album *Rumours*, in 1976. The 45rpm single would grace my first Ferguson stereo system, bought with my hard-earned 'paper round' money the previous year. It was one of the first singles I had purchased after hearing it a few times on BBC Radio One, the premier radio channel for popular music in the U.K. at the time. From that moment on, Stevie Nicks was my fantasy woman, like no doubt of many other young teenagers. Eventually seeing her perform with Fleetwood Mac a few years later was a dream come true; maybe not like other dreams I must have had of her but now cannot remember! Thankfully, I was not alone, as Hepworth (2017) reminds me: "There was nothing of the standard sex kitten about her. Nevertheless, out there in the dark, thousands of young men were stirred." Yes, I was one of those young men but I am not sure I would "scale the steepest castle walls with a rose in [my] teeth in exchange for just one of her sidelong looks" (p. 159). The way she graced across the stage with her long flowing dress and then rocked with her band members, especially her (ex)partner Lindsey Buckingham set the gold bar, along with Boston a few months earlier, as far as concerts went. But then again, that was before May 1981, when all that went before did exactly that: it went, because for me, something new was on the horizon and it would change my world, only I did not know it at the time. This was the time when 'corporate rock' was nearing the end of its time as reign supreme and Punk rock, its challenger had become normalized and Electro pop was on its way to dominate the pop charts, in the U.K. at least.

Although I was a relatively new comer to the world of live concerts by big names, I had seen Queen fronted by that master showman Freddie Mercury and Genesis

²⁴ Appears under photograph on unnumbered page 9 in the middle of the book.

fronted by Phil Collins, as well as Rod Stewart, The Police, Status Quo, to name a few. But nothing prepared me for what took place on that evening of May 20th in a place you could hardly call a concert hall, where the car parking was in nearby agricultural fields. Nevertheless, for this concert, the day the show was announced, I had sent off my 'post office' money order of £6.50 per ticket to Harvey Goldsmith, the promoter at the time, to ensure my friends and I would get seats. This was in the days before Ticketmaster was even a dream of some future bright spark. The tickets arrived by post and we were rewarded for our efficiency by getting seats in the fifth row from the front of stage, something that is virtually impossible these days, with such seats being reserved for corporate sponsorship, industry experts or huge VIP package pricing.

Leaving aside the antics of getting to the venue from our hometown of Leicester, some 70 miles away, we arrived for the show with high anticipation. Could Springsteen and his E. Street Band live up to the hype that we had created in our own minds? Could Springsteen deliver a concert experience that topped Boston or Fleetwood Mac? The answer to that question would soon be revealed. We took our seats and savored the atmosphere of all the people around us and of those mostly behind us, as we reveled in our luck of being this close to the stage, just right of center. It was the perfect ticket apart from those in the first four rows, of course.

To our surprise, there was no support act to 'warm up' the audience, as that was and still is the practice of most live concert shows, but not Springsteen shows, as we were about to learn for the very first time. We waited patiently, excitedly, for the lights to dim and for the show to start. We did not have to wait long. The lights went down a little after 8:00 p.m., the band all came on to the usual cheer from the crowd, and the show started with the same frenetic energy that Springsteen displays nowadays, some 38 years later. Immediately, everyone around us was out of their makeshift chairs that were hooked onto each other to make up the floor seating, and standing on them for the first four songs.

Most of the people around us were dancing in their chairs; others were cheering and singing along and watching. Then Springsteen slowed the pace down, no doubt to catch his own breath as well as to allow all of us to catch ours, and started to answer the questions that both my friend and I were excited about without knowing what we were truly expecting. The welcome break from what seemed like an onslaught to the senses

without the use of any fancy lighting or technical props or smoke that had us in awe at the Boston concert 18 months earlier at the same venue, was very much appreciated. Little did we know at the time that we were going to be treated to a masterclass in a live show. The sound was crystal clear and the stage lighting as simple as could be, but very effectively executed to highlight certain songs. The first slow song of the evening was such an example. Coming in at number five in the set list of the evening, Springsteen sang a song called “The Factory,” a track from his ‘*Darkness on the Edge of Town*’ album from 1978. It is a song about a working-class father who goes out early in the morning to work at a factory, which takes up most of his day, as he earns a wage to provide for his family. Dieser (2014) spells out in some detail how this very song helped him “re-conceptualize” how he thought of his father from “an adult perspective” and aided his understanding of the social factors that impacted his working-class life, remembering his father as the construction worker who “would come home from work, eat, and disengage by watching TV in a comatose manner” (p.15). The song had a similar effect on Pratt (1990), as he recalls how listening to the song reminded him of the years his “father spent in exhausting 12-hour days as the foreman on the plant line in a small truck plant” (p.178). Such is the power of a short song, that it reaches across nations and cultures.

As Springsteen sang the opening lines of the song, I immediately saw my own father through those lyrics: “Early in the morning, man rises from bed, puts on his clothes, man takes his lunch, walks out in the morning light, it’s the working, the working, just the working life”. My father, out of sight from his sleeping son, left the house every morning and braved the rain and snow of the British winter to walk the 3-mile journey to Dunlop, a factory that processed rubber for tires and took up so much of his life. As Springsteen continued singing this slow number, I realized that this was the first time in a live concert that a performance, a song, directly and intimately connected with my ‘real’ life. If I had known Springsteen’s take on rock concerts, I may have understood or expected this to happen. Springsteen says: “People don’t come to rock shows to learn something. They come to be *reminded* of something they already know and feel deep down in their gut” (Springsteen 2016, p. 236). This was certainly true as I saw my father’s life right in front of me, there and then, in the midst of that song. I was beginning to see learning in another dimension, seeing from the inside, from memories of my father. Here was learning redefined. This was embodied learning in the here and now, in

the living and present moment. It is very similar to Fels & Belliveau's (2008) description of how drama can draw you into the "here and now," highlighting the "importance of being present in the moment of dramatic engagement" (p.36). Prior to this instant, most songs heard in concerts were entertainment, escapism or pure fantasy.

The start of the show should have been a clue to what was coming later on, but I was so caught up in the moment, that I and did not think ahead. Had I thought that far, I would have maybe sensed that ahead lay my future education, not that education of school and classes but the kind of education that Brooks (2009) described 30 years later. I had no clue what it was at the time, but something felt very different about this concert compared with any I had been to before. Springsteen continued the father's theme with another 'slow' song from the *'The River'* album called "Independence Day," prefaced with a short monologue about his father's struggles. This has been described as "perhaps the apotheosis of Springsteen writing about his father, and something of a rapprochement between the two men" (Wiersema 2011, p.19).

The performance of "Independence Day" was moving, but the real shift for me came with song number 10, after about 45 minutes into the show, when Springsteen introduced a 'new song' that was preceded by a little story. Springsteen began a preamble, speaking to the audience for the second time that night, as he was so accustomed to doing in those days, regaling the audience with elaborate stories. Storytelling was a consistent theme for Springsteen, making him stand apart from most other rock/pop artists of the time. He had discovered the power and the importance of storytelling that Thomas King (2003) speaks of, that connects us to one another. This feature of telling stories, often personal, in concert was something he would later tell David Hepworth of the BBC, was just something he "started way back when and continued," and was the reason why he picked up the guitar in the first place, as he confirmed: "I just wanna talk to you" (Springsteen, 1984). In Bingley Hall, he was talking to us and my ears were on full alert, and I was "wide awake" (Greene 1978) as he slowly strummed his guitar without any band backing. Eager to hear what Springsteen had to say and in anticipation of what song was coming next, as well as a chance to catch our collective breath and to rest our legs, we sat down in our seats along with most of the audience for the second time since the band appeared on stage.

Springsteen began to tell the story of his attempt to see Elvis Presley in his home in Memphis, Tennessee, in the early hours of one morning in the 1970s. Peter Ames Carlin maintains that Springsteen may have turned this “story of his 1975²⁵ attempt to visit the King by jumping his Graceland manse’ gates into a fine piece of self-deprecating, hero worshipping stage banter” (Carlin 2012, p. 247), but it did not feel like any ‘banter’ to me. It felt very real and sincere in his delivery and I was hanging on to every word Springsteen spoke:

In 19 eh 77, we played down, down in Memphis Tennessee, and eh it was about 3 in the morning after, after the show. We went down in a taxi cab, me and Steve and we went down to Graceland, Elvis’s house, and I’m standing outside the gate, and I looked in and I can see a light on upstairs and I figured, well, it must be Elvis. He must be sitting up reading tonight. I climbed over the wall and ran up the driveway and the guard caught me and he said I had to go out. And he said Elvis was in Lake Tahoe. It wasn’t too long after that, that he died, he died and it was hard to understand how somebody that, that was so alive and had so much, looked so bad in the end.

(Springsteen 1981)

Elvis Presley was an enormous influence on both Springsteen and Steve Van Zandt (his long-time friend and guitarist with his E. Street Band) in their early years. Springsteen’s story of seeing Elvis Presley on the Ed Sullivan show in 1956/7²⁶ has been widely documented as the pivotal moment that changed his life at the age of 7, as that was the moment Springsteen realized what he wanted to do was become a musician (Dolan 2012, Marsh 1981, Carlin 2012). Springsteen ended this preamble by leaving us in the audience to ponder over the reality of how great things can turn bad. He then started to sing the first of two songs that I had never heard before. He started singing in slow tempo, with a single spotlight focused on him in the middle of the stage, the opening lines: “She drew out all her money from a Southern Trust, and she put a little boy on a Greyhound bus, leaving Memphis with a guitar in his hand on a one-way ticket to the promised land.” What was this song, we wondered as my friend Bracey and I looked at each other in amazement? We soon realized that this was a new song about Elvis, when he sang “And the man on the radio said Elvis Presley died, come on come

²⁵ Note the date of 1975 does not coincide with Springsteen’s account of the story and is most likely an oversight by Ames Carlin.

²⁶ There are differing accounts as to exactly when this was. See Carlin (2012), Dolan (2012) Marsh (1981) Springsteen (2016)

on let's go tonight." I began to 'fill up' and became teary eyed, something that most men try to hide in public, but this was uncontrollable. I was also instantly transported back to where I was when I first heard the news that Elvis had died, as every one of my generation remembers where they were that night. I was lying in my bed, listening quietly to the illegal broadcast of Radio Luxemburg before going to sleep. This radio station was a pirate radio station broadcast from a ship in the North Sea and they played pop music at night. Funny how music instantly takes you back to an experience from a distant time.

Towards the end of the song came the line: "They found him slumped up against a drain with a whole load of nothing running through his veins." Try as I might, I could not stop that lonely first tear slowly moving down my left cheek. I could not explain to this day the set of emotions that raced through my mind in seconds, but they did and they defied words. Leland (2005) talks about achieving a 'Transcendental musical experience' (TMES) and how music touches the soul:

TMES can range from intense pleasure to chills running along the spine or a spontaneous flow of tears. During a TME, a listener may feel taken over by the music, unable to move, or have an uncontrollable urge to dance. One's inner state may be serene, or may rise gradually from well-being through bliss, to a sense of barely containable ecstasy.

(p.4)

Leland expands: "The soul sometimes uses tears to highlight a moment in which one has experienced a great truth. That's the meaning behind the phrase "being moved to tears" (p. 28). When discussing TMES, Leland maintains that "something about these experiences goes to the very core of who we are, both as individuals and as human beings" (p. 12). Of course, I had no idea at the time of such things as TMES and was merely responding to what my body was experiencing both physically and more so, emotionally. Then, of course my right cheek demanded that it too be graced with its own lonely tear. Nanoseconds later I found myself internally working hard and holding back that tear so that nobody could see that I was close to crying (because young men or older ones for that matter, do not cry at rock concerts!).

It was the most bizarre experience I had ever had up to that point and something I will always remember, as it became ingrained into my very being. Getting teary eyed at a rock concert seemed to be an oxymoron and certainly not done by men. What on earth

was going on? A lone singer in a spotlight on stage, five rows from me, was having this incredible effect on me. I struggled to look around (for the fear that others would see and judge me) to see if others were having a remotely similar reaction? I was at this concert with my best friend and two other friends I did not know that well at the time, and it would not do to be seen tearful, let alone crying. That just did not seem to be cool. Such was the internalized stereotype of the acceptable male on that day in 1981. However, what was going on inside of me seemed to be completely from another world, or perhaps it was the real world inside of me that I was beginning to discover. I had not felt like this ever before at a rock concert. Nothing had moved me to this degree at a concert. This was the embryonic start of my 'second education' (Brooks 2009), only I did not know it at the time.

The song continued with "Bye bye Johnny, you didn't have to die, you didn't have to die." The effectiveness of Springsteen's lone voice, its clarity allowing me to hear every word, and the soft accompanying instrumentation with simple lighting, created a state where you could almost hear a pin drop (not always easy to obtain with some 12,000 people at a 'rock concert'). Like me, the whole audience was virtually transfixed onto the lone spotlight figure of Springsteen on stage. This version of "Johnny Bye Bye" was different to the one Springsteen officially released much later on his boxset of 'out takes' called *Tracks* (Springsteen 1998). That official release version is slightly more upbeat, with minor changes to the lyrics (Springsteen 1998a, p. 26; Flannigan & Phillips 1998). The version that moved me so much at first hearing was delivered in slower tempo and sounded more acoustic than the version that appears as song number 18 on the second CD on *Tracks*.

Before I had a chance to completely process this song in its entirety, the audience applause barely began, and Springsteen launched into another song I had never heard before. This was a slowed down version of a song I later found out was by Woody Guthrie, called "This Land is Your Land." Springsteen's slow delivery provided me with a visceral and clear message that 'this land' that I stood on is 'my land' and it was a part of me. I belonged to it and it belonged to me. It was here I realized that I belonged to all lands in every country because we all belong to this earth, it is the only one we have. Here was the place-based pedagogy (Gruenewald 2008 & 2003, Ellsworth 2005) educating me like no school had ever done. Through this one song, my identity as a 22-year-old British Citizen of Indian birth shifted, my understanding of place and

belonging forever transformed. Sometime soon afterwards, I remember adopting the phrase 'I'm a citizen of the world.' Almost from that point on, I firmly believed that I did not belong to any one country, no matter what my passport said. I belonged to the world, I was a citizen of the world and the land I walked on "was made for you and me," as Springsteen sang much slower than the version he officially released, also on *Tracks*, in 1998. Here was the power of song, the power of live performance and the power of music as a pedagogical tool on full display, and I was learning like I never learnt at school because it was teaching me like no school had ever taught me.

After the intermission, Springsteen and the band seemed to move up a gear, as if that was possible, and made the whole show feel like a party, with everyone dancing on their chairs, with strangers and by themselves. Here was the power of popular music moving the body to dance and uniting strangers into a common humanity. Towards the end, our hands were beginning to hurt from clapping and our voices began to turn hoarse. It was truly amazing and felt almost spiritual. All four of us, but especially Bracey and I, were completely 'blown away,' just like Pratt (1990, p.viii) would be many years later. We had not experienced anything like that before. We did not want it to end, but it did and there was nothing else left to do in a barn that was emptying fast; we made our way back to the car on a natural high that defies description. We knew we had seen the greatest pop/rock entertainer, but had to wait for others to expand on that. Steve Earl obliges in an interview, when he says that Springsteen "may be the greatest entertainer rock 'n' roll has ever produced, period. It will be a long time before anybody comes close to that" (Burke 2011, p. 171).

No show, concert or performance had ever left me feeling so thought provoked, tearful, overjoyed or ecstatic and exhausted. But we were young and I could take it.

The only thing we did not know at the time was that it was Springsteen's intention to make us feel like we felt. I only learnt that much later in life, but it was all there to see on this magical night as Springsteen confirmed to Hann (2016a) many years on:

I come out believing there's no tomorrow night, there wasn't last night, there's just tonight. And I have built up the skills to be able to provide, under the right conditions, a certain transcendent evening, hopefully an evening you'll remember when you go home. Not that you'll just remember it was a good concert, but you'll remember the possibilities the evening laid out in front of you, as far as where you could take your life, or how you're thinking

about your friends, or your wife or your girlfriend, or your best pal, or your job, your work, what you want to do with your life. These are all things, I believe, that music can accommodate and can provide service in. That's what we try to deliver.

(para. 29)

We wandered casually back to our car, parked in a nearby field that had been officially designated as the car park. With the experience of previous concerts, we had perfected the art of leaving the concert by not going in the long line of vehicles standing still in their attempts to get home. Long lines of taillights, bumper to bumper (fender to fender), as we called it in the U.K. with engines running, moving by the inch, if at all. Those lines could take anything between 30-45 minutes of unnecessary gas burning to reach the exit gate. Our tried and tested plan to avoid this was to have a flask of hot drink and sandwiches ready to replenish us as we watched others participate in the madness to reach the makeshift exit gate, only to jam the single road leading to the major routes out of the region.

We sat in the comfort of my battered old Morris Marina two door coupe admiring our handiwork of "Follow us to see the Boss" written on the trunk, as we reviewed, replayed and shared our thoughts on the spectacle we had just witnessed. Our next 30 to 50 minutes would be spent having a hot drink, eating and listening to Springsteen music blasting from the car cassette player. There were no CD players in those days and digital devices had yet to be envisaged by another bright spark. We would watch and laugh at the line of red rear lights going nowhere fast.

Once all the lines of red lights had all but disappeared, we made our move to get home, I dropped off my once in a lifetime experience sharers, and headed to the comfort of my own bed for about 5 hours of much needed sleep. The next morning, I realized that there were only 16 more days before I would see Springsteen again. That would be at Wembley Arena on the 5th June. So, I had plenty of time to mull things over about what I had been a part of, and to contemplate what was to come.

By now Dave Marsh (1981) had updated and republished his first biography of Springsteen called *Born to Run*, after his most famous song and album to date. Both Bracey and I just had to get it, to try and make sense of why Springsteen was so good live, and to find out what his story was. I went out and got the book and flipped through

it. Reading all the way through was too much like hard work, but little did I know that it would soon become very useful for a completely different reason.

6.3. Wembley

Sixteen days passed by. I had three tickets for the show at Wembley Arena on Friday June 5, 1981. After Springsteen had to postpone his originally scheduled dates, he had added some more, and these included the Bingley Hall in Stafford and this Wembley Arena date. Bracey had decided, wrongly in my opinion, to “give it a miss” much to his disappointment, as it turned out. His decision was made partly because it was a workday and travelling to the outskirts of London on a Friday night was a bit too much, but also because we were both going to the last two shows of this U.K. tour in Birmingham in two days’ time, June 7 and 8th. As for myself, I could not wait after the May 20th show. This time there would be no fifth row from the front of stage, but seat 3, in row 14 of block D was waiting for me, and I was going. I had to see if it would be as good again or had that been just a one-off show that had me in tears, laughter, ecstasy and tired out from the power of rock and roll? Could Springsteen be that good that he could do it all over again, or was it just a bizarre set of circumstances and the over excitement of seeing him live for the first time that made the May 20th show so special? I could not wait to hear all those songs again live in concert, but I did feel a bit of apprehension in case some form of disappointment awaited me. I did not want to have the experience of seeing Rod Stewart, whom I had gone to see a second time after a couple of years at the Granby Hall, in Leicester, where he opened the set with exactly the same song in exactly the same style as he had on the previous tour.

The two tickets I had went to another good friend, Steve, and his girlfriend. Steve was interested in going, even though he was not a big Springsteen fan. This was not unusual, as most of my friends had not heard of Springsteen at the time. The only reference some had was the song “Hungry Heart”, but because it had never entered the Top forty to become a hit in the U.K., it came and went like the rest of the work of unknown up and coming artists that never ‘make it.’ But, like Jon Landau²⁷ several years prior to me, I had seen the light, albeit for me it was only sixteen days before. Steve and

²⁷ Jon Landau was and still is Springsteen’s manager. He coined the famous phrase: “I saw the future of rock and roll and its name is Bruce Springsteen” (Carlin 2012, p.180; Dolan 2012, p111).

I had started to learn to play the guitar together, struggling to grasp the chords, pushing through with sore fingertips in his apartment in what was labelled 'practice'. I knew Steve well and knew that I was in good company as far as appreciating a live performance at Wembley Arena.

That Friday could not arrive quick enough and the usual arrangements were made. The pick-up points and times had been finalized. In 1981, the hundred-mile drive into London was nowhere near as busy as it is these days. Still, no decorating the car this time, no time for that. I left work at 5:00 p.m., cleaned up fast, collected my two companions and straight down the M1 motorway we went. Steve kept the road atlas on his lap, to have it handy for when we got off the first ever built motorway in Britain and into the roads that led us to the arena that sits next to the world-famous Wembley Stadium, where England's national soccer team raised the World Cup in 1966 (the only time) despite having invented the game of soccer. That was all incidental, as a more important event awaited. We arrived at Wembley Arena with considerable ease, but with next to no time to spare, as the 100-mile journey had taken two hours. We pulled up just after 7.30 p.m., the billed time for the start of the concert, with no time to waste. As I parked up, a man who I thought was the parking attendant approached the car and asked, "Do you have any tickets to sell?" Tickets to sell! "Are you crazy?", I thought. "We just drove down 100 miles at breakneck speed, just to sell you our precious tickets. You must be joking!" This had never happened to me before.

It was a completely new experience for all three of us in the car. Questions were racing through my mind: why would you go to a venue without tickets? What was this guy doing? Was this guy going to break into our car after we go? What was going on here? The intrigue got the better of me and I felt compelled to ask what he was doing. Little did I know that this was my first experience with a ticket tout or a ticket scalper. He said that he was looking for tickets for some people that did not have any. I looked around and could not see many people, as most concert goers were already inside the arena as the concert was about to start. We had about 5 to 10 minutes to get to our seats, but my intrigue got the better of me and he knew it. He recognized, the pro that he was, that I was somewhat interested but was not sure. I am sure he saw people like me at every concert. Before I could formulate any question, he asked how many tickets we had and what type. I replied: "three floor seats," to which he immediately responded with "I'll give you fifty," meaning £50. I was not very good at math, but I knew I had paid £6.00

each for the three tickets in my pocket and the most that came to was under £20. Time was evaporating fast.

The very short exchange that followed made my jaw drop to the floor, figuratively of course. Precious moments were ticking away and Springsteen would be on stage in a few minutes, and I was wasting time here. Then the man said: "each." I uttered, "what?" It was not even a question while locking the car, with Steve looking on confusingly. A split second later, he said, "I'll give you £150 for all three." I froze momentarily. I could not think straight. In a time to come, I would recognise this as the perfect *Stop* (Applebaum 1995), where I would see in that space of momentary freeze all the learning that existed there, in those couple of seconds. We all looked at each other and time stood still for a moment, while I quickly tried to work out what that meant. Each ticket cost £6.00. £150 minus £18.00 equaled £130 ish. What?? That was more money than I was making in a month. Over four weeks of pay! The temptation to hand him the tickets, collect the cash and go and have a meal and head back home before the last orders rang at the local pub was overwhelming. After all, Steve and Maggie were not that into Springsteen and I was going to see him again twice in the next few days in Birmingham. This was sweet. I half nervously and half-jokingly said, "you're joking?" and he replied: "No!" I looked at Steve and Maggie, who raised both their eyebrows with a shoulder shrug. I took that to mean that it was up to me and that they would be ok either way. After all, I had bought and paid for the tickets and they had yet to reimburse me. They had never had such an encounter either. Precious seconds wasted away. Decisions, decisions. I took another glance at all three of them standing there in the Wembley car park as time pressed on. What was I to do?

Was this guy serious? Could he make me £130 richer in a minute? In 1981, that was a lot of money for the likes of me. A profit of over 700% seemed incomprehensible. I took another flashing glance at us in this crazy situation, all standing next to the car, and put my hand on the tickets in my pocket with the guy staring intently. Sanity had ensued. "Come on, let's go!" I said to my friends.

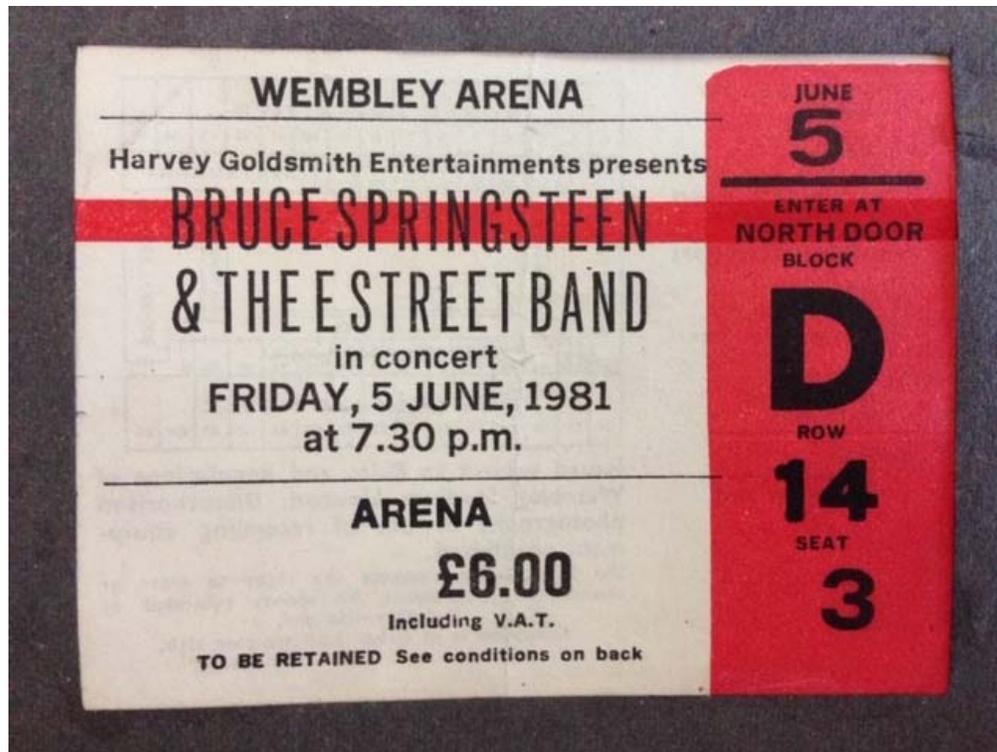


Figure 1. The ticket that never got resold for over 700% profit.
Photograph by author 2019

No amount of money could have provided me with what I had felt in that ‘grotty’ Bingley Hall 16 days prior. What was I thinking? The three of us ran to the entrance, with me leading the way. We made our way to our seats on the floor, the fold-up interlocking kind, and a couple of minutes later the lights went down, cheers followed and everybody was up and standing on their flimsy make-shift chairs. Then, with a mumble of a count of “ah one, two,” the drums pounded and the opening riff to the song ‘*Born to Run*’ ripped through the sound system. It was unbelievable! Springsteen had decided to open the show with his most famous song to date, the one he always played at the encore. This was unheard of. Who was this guy, who never had a top forty hit in the U.K., to come out and open with his most well-known song? No artist plays their signature song to start the show. They save it for the end, so that everyone goes home on a high. But this was not any ‘other’ artist. This was the ‘future of rock n roll’ as Jon Landau had predicted in 1974 (Carlin 2013, p.180; Dolan 2012, p. 111), only I did not know of such accolades at the time. I was, however, witnessing that future first hand, in the flesh, in the here and now. And boy, did it feel good! But could Springsteen deliver again on this night in our capital city? Would I feel the same as I did over two weeks before? Would he play that Elvis song again?

Yes, yes, and yes were the answers. Not only would he play that Elvis number in slot seven and have me battle tears again, but he also had me in another shock as early as song number four. After the first three songs that did not allow us to catch our collective breath, Springsteen slowed things down with a slow strumming of his guitar as he stood alone in the spotlight and without saying anything he stopped strumming and started slowly singing the line, "If your heart is restless from waiting so long, if you're tired and weary and you can't go on." What on earth was this? I wondered. Then he sang; "If a distant dream is calling you, then there's just one thing you can do." It was quiet and you could hear a pin drop and I was hanging on every word that came slowly through the airways from the stage to the middle of the arena, where I was. This was new, something I had never heard of before, and I felt those goose bumps rising again. The next line brought me close to tears, "Follow that dream wherever it may lead, follow that dream to find the love you need." He went on to sing, "I need someone with a love I can trust, and together we'll search for the things that come to us." I later discovered that this song was an Elvis Presley number from a film of the same name from 1962 called 'Follow that Dream.' It was a song written by Fred Wise and Ben Weisman and recorded by Elvis Presley. Springsteen had taken the song and completely revamped it by slowing it down and changing the odd lyric. It was no longer the happy go lucky number Elvis sang in the film.²⁸

He had done it again, only this time so early in the show and I lost the battle again as my eyes were filling up fast, this time with much reflection on my own life and where should it go. How do I 'follow that dream?' How will I know which dream to follow and how will I know where it will lead me? I never got such inspiration to ask such questions throughout my schooling as I did in those few minutes. Again, amazing what art and music can do when we open ourselves to it. This was going straight into my being and has stayed there ever since, whereas virtually all I was taught in school fell by the wayside like 'water off a duck's back.' This is why most of us forget what we learnt in school, because it does not penetrate us like the arts can. Springsteen continued regardless of what was happening to me. By now he was accompanied by soft

²⁸ Elvis's version can be seen here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Am05yZehIAM>, whereas Springsteen's version I witnessed can be heard, with the wonders of YouTube, on a poor quality audio of the actual concert I was at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Di6xW5BKmpl> and a slightly better version can be heard from *The River Tour* on his show in Sweden on May 7, 1981 at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iDjLDacm5DY>

instrumentation, with the organ being the most prominent, as he sang in a lonely but quiet voice “Now every man has the right to live, the right to a chance, to give what he has to give, the right to fight for the things he believes, for the things that come to him in dreams.” He finished off as quietly as he started: “Baby in dreams, I walk in dreams, I talk in dreams, I live in dreams.” How this could not affect anyone, was a mystery to me? It was incredibly moving, thought provoking and spine chilling. It was a call to examine yourself and see where you could go, and to not let anything or anybody stand in your way. It was more than entertainment, way more, and I could not quantify or describe it with words. It was exactly as Michael Hann said years later when he described the experience of seeing Springsteen live in concert; “A Springsteen show makes you turn both inward and outward. He demands you connect with the world and look to yourself. He makes you feel like the best version of yourself” (Hann 2016, para 12). This is what good education must do, but often fails to do. I certainly did not look inwards and outwards during my schooling, nor did all my friends. For me, this went right up to graduate study. Songs were no longer just entertainment. They began to make me think and see things I had not seen before. Certain songs also started to make me see things in a different way. Here was living proof of how the arts shift perception and reveal what is often not seen in everyday life.

Had I had Michael Hann’s recent account of ‘How a Bruce Springsteen show makes you feel,’ I might have been better prepared. Hann describes how, for him, there are “moments in a Springsteen show” when he knows his “eyes will prick with tears” (Hann 2016). He goes on to say, “But there’s always some point where my eyes don’t just prick, where I find myself suddenly weeping, full-on. And I never know when that moment will come.” Hann then offers this explanation as to why that is so:

Partly that’s because Springsteen changes his sets so much from night to night that you can’t be sure what will be played (of the 33 songs played at Wembley, only 19 had been played at Coventry. There is no other artist playing stadiums who will alter their setlist, taking requests from the crowd, like that). And partly it’s because I can never know which song will capture the particular shade of emotion I am feeling at a given moment. At Wembley, the tears came when he played Tougher Than the Rest, from 1987’s Tunnel of Love album.

(para. 7-8)

It all felt too much, and by the end of 'Follow That Dream,' any doubts I had coming to the show were simply shattered. We were so glad that the temptation of £150 in the car park twenty minutes before did not lure me away from this priceless event. We spent the rest of the concert standing on and off our chairs, mostly standing on them, dancing in the aisles with complete strangers, singing at the top of our lungs, laughing, crying, and creating powerful memories that cannot ever be erased.

Yes, Springsteen did it again, and with some completely different songs thrown into the mix from 16 days prior. These included a recent Clash hit, 'I fought the Law' and Elvis's 'Can't help falling in love' as the penultimate encore number. Also included was the song 'Because the night,' that Top Ten hit for Patti Smith that Springsteen had discarded. Every feeling that I had during my first Springsteen show at Bingley Hall was confirmed again and in some style. I should have known better! Now the question became, "could this be equaled, never mind be topped?" For that answer, I would have to only wait two days.

6.4. Birmingham

I should have been better prepared for the penultimate Springsteen show of *The River Tour*, but I was not. I was still recovering from that Wembley experience two days prior. Two shows and two sets of tears, two more shows to go. What was next, I wondered?

My friend Bracey had heard somewhere that Springsteen routinely met fans who were so devoted that after a three-hour show would hang around the back-stage door to get an autograph. We had not done that after the May 20th show, and in retrospect wish we had. To this day, I do not really know why we did not; maybe we were too overwhelmed or maybe out of consideration of the two friends accompanying us, who may not have wanted to indulge in such an activity? Or maybe because it was a Wednesday night and we all had to go to work the next day? But we did not, and I still consider it a missed opportunity. However, that opportunity would come again, and it would not be missed again. So, this time I threw my camera into the car, even though I knew it had no film roll inside. I should have stopped on route to pick up a film roll, but this was 1981 and supermarkets were few and far in between and none on our route, as it was mainly all motorway. Also, there were only a few shops open on Sundays and the

American influence of virtually everything being open on Sundays was yet to fully take root in England. The end result, a camera without a film, meant no photographs. Not that night, anyway. That night was all about the concert and we wondered what else was in store? A lot more, as it happened.

I will not bore the reader, except to say that another stunning song we had not heard before entered our being and has remained there ever since as a favorite. It turned out to be yet another Springsteen reworking of someone else's song, this time a Jimmy Cliff song called "Trapped" that was unrecognizable from the original, as we later found out. There was also the added bonus of seeing the legendary Pete Townsend of The Who join Springsteen and the band for two songs in the encore. However, the most important part of this night's story was not about the concert itself, as Springsteen had surpassed all expectations and delivered on each occasion, but what happened after the show. It was magical.

Sunday, June 7th, 1981 is a night that I will never forget. Why? Was it because the concert that night was the best? No, nothing could beat the last two shows; they could be equaled, but I could not see them being topped. June 7th, 1981 would become very special because it was the first time I met Bruce Springsteen in person. I stood next to him, I put my left arm around his shoulders and gave him a little hug, and even managed a brief conversation with him. I also got the chance to witness Springsteen interacting with a few other fans. It seems as surreal now as it did then, but it did happen, and I remember it as if it was yesterday.

After another night of Springsteen in concert with yet more surprises, we wandered around the same arena where a few months earlier, I had seen Queen be the first major act to play in the newly built National Exhibition Centre (N.E.C.), looking for some kind of sign that would tell us where Springsteen would show up. As we turned a corner, we saw a small group of people, about 6 in total, gathered around and standing in a small circle. Both Bracey and I headed towards them hoping they may have an idea of which door Springsteen may emerge from. As we got nearer, it became clear that these were Springsteen fans just chatting to one another. When we got to about four feet from them, we were stunned by what we saw. In amongst these four or five individuals was none other than Bruce Springsteen himself. "What the hell?" I thought. Bracey and I looked at each other in aghast as we both did a double take. The one where you shake

your head in disbelief and then look again to make sure what you think you are seeing is indeed what you are seeing.

Yes, it was Springsteen, and he was just standing there, very unassuming and just quietly chatting with the handful of people. He seemed very friendly and casual. He seemed to be genuinely engaged and interested in all those four or five around him. We soon realized that the guy standing a little behind and to his right, saying nothing at all was his security, which meant there were only four other fans there. With me and Bracey adding to make up the half dozen, we were in heaven. We could not believe this was happening. Six of us standing there and casually chatting with Bruce. Initially we were completely lost for words, but because it was so casual, we just joined in the conversation and took our turn each having a once in a lifetime opportunity to converse with the man. Springsteen's manner and his calmness certainly helped. His dress and appearance were very casual and modest. He was wearing jeans that showed some wear as did his brown leather jacket with its own scuff marks. This did not look like someone who entertained thousands about an hour ago. A couple of the fans had come prepared, unlike me and Bracey, with some mementos to be signed. We had nothing with us, but when we saw a couple have their tickets signed, we soon pulled out our little slips of paper that had guaranteed our entry to the show earlier.



Figure 2. Precious signature on first meeting Springsteen.
Photograph by author 2019

This was the stuff of dreams and envy of many. I asked him how he felt, and he said, "Fine, I feel fine." Then jokingly, as I put my left arm around his shoulders and gave him a hug to show my affection and appreciation, I said, "Bruce, can you jump into the tenth-row tomorrow night, just to the right, as we will be there?" Perhaps this was as absurd a request as one could ever make, but he had jumped into the second row earlier on in the evening, much to the astonishment of all that were there. That was the first time, in person, I had seen a rock star get that close to his audience and be completely safe. Normally, the ones on the stage are kept well away from those who pay for them to be on that stage. Most performers seem to want it that way, too. His response to my outlandish request was a simple, "uhmm see what happens." He just seemed to be such a nice guy and here we were standing around in the late hours of a Sunday night, just talking as friends do. Then after a while he said he, "uhmm better get going" and said his goodbyes as he and his guard walked back into the arena. This down to earth, not yet the megastar the world would come to know four years later, was elevated even higher in my world.

I could not believe I had a camera but no film to capture all this. Damn!! Why did the digital age not arrive in 1981? Still, I have the picture, fresh and clear in my mind and no still shot to detract from those precious moments. Plus, as Berger (1972, 2001) and Hockney (2008) remind us, a photograph is never the same as the real image due to its limitations. I will let that comfort me while I still kick myself for not being prepared enough to have a film roll for once in my life when I needed it most. Such is life! The next night was a different story.

The next night, the last of the U.K. *The River Tour*, we came prepared with a camera and film loaded and ready to go. There was going to be no missed photo opportunity this time. After all, having to tell others that we actually met Bruce Springsteen and took no photograph was a bit of a problem as we were not sure that they would believe us. Plus, a photo with Bruce would be one hell of a memento and it would be for life! We had our signed tickets from the night before (see above) and they were very precious, but not as precious as a photograph, we thought. We were incredibly naïve and inexperienced, but full of excitement and on a mission.

This last night would be different from the night before, where we had Springsteen exclusively to ourselves, the six or so of us. Both Bracey and I had discussed the possibility that 'word might get around' that Bruce was backstage last night and that would bring out more bodies into the darkness of the Birmingham night behind the N.E.C. stage door. As with the previous night, after the concert we headed back to our car to have a quick hot drink and grab a sandwich, and then make our way to the same spot where we stood next to Springsteen 24 hours earlier. Only this time we would have a photograph to catch the moment that would then be treasured for life, or so we thought.

As we excitedly made our way towards that sacred little spot of tarmac that Springsteen stood on next to us the night before, we noticed from a distance that there were way more people gathered in wait to have their dreams fulfilled like Bracey and I had last night. We were all following that dream. Nerves began to make their appearance, felt with an initial reaction of "oh no," what a disaster. "Damn those other fans" raced through my mind first. Then it was, "we won't be able to spend as much time with him as we did last night." It sounds crazy, and it was. We were like children who do not want to share their toys but are forced to. It was our fate, not something we had

choice with. As we got closer to the group of about 20 to 25 people, there was no Springsteen among them. Fear struck momentarily. "Was he not going to show up?" was the instant thought that flashed. "Narrh, it's Bruce, of course he'll show up," we simultaneously confirmed as if we now knew Bruce personally and were vouching for him. We were the believers of a line he sang much later and believed that our "faith will be rewarded" (Springsteen 2000). Only, we were not all that sure, but confidently hoped he would not let us down. After all, I had rectified my mistake of yesterday and had my camera with that all-important film in it this time.

He did not let us down, but the rules had changed from the night before. After the end of the show, Bruce was to sit in the front passenger seat of a Volkswagen mini-bus and meet his larger than yesterday crowd of fans that way. We joined the 20 or so people who stood around chatting, and mixed in with this small but devoted Springsteen cult that Bracey and I had very recently joined. Standing around chatting with these fellow Springsteen fans seemed to remove our selfishness of having to share our newly found idol with others. Before Springsteen emerged, some from this small crowd seemed sure Bruce would come out, others simply hoped to God that he would. Bracey and I were somewhere in the middle of those silent deliberations. All of a sudden, a stage door opened and someone who was not Bruce Springsteen walked towards us. Our hearts raced and then nearly collapsed. Before we could figure out what was happening, the gentleman told us that Mr. Springsteen (that is what he called him but to us now he was Bruce) would be coming out shortly, that we needed to form an orderly line in order to have an autograph, and that he was going to be in a vehicle. "A vehicle." "Mr. Springsteen." "uhmmm," a bit different from last night I thought, and I bet I was not the only one. I did not think of him as "Mr. Springsteen." He was Bruce to us, and the night before proved it. Nevertheless, excitement ensued or was it sheer giddiness, I was not sure. We all got in a line without objection and waited with bated breath. It was going to happen again.

Minutes later, the big door slid open and out towards us drove a mini-bus. Finally, it was happening. We were going to meet Bruce for the second time. This time Bruce was sitting in the front passenger seat, accompanied by a driver and another person in one of the rear seats, who we assumed was security. Bracey and I were about 15th in line and we held our prized possessions that were going to be signed very soon. We all inched our way forward patiently and respectfully towards the figure we could see

through the front windshield of the mini-bus. We concluded that because there were over triple the number of fans than the night before, Springsteen and his team decided it would be better or safer for him to stay in the mini-bus and meet people through the open window. Because of our experience of the previous night, I made sure I had my camera ready as well as a rare item for his signature. I also had a burning question: why did he not jump into the 10th row, as I had requested the night before? Such are the things young minds think of.



Figure 3. Springsteen meeting and happily signing for my friend Bracey.
Photo by author 1981



Figure 4. Springsteen signing for another fan.

Photo by author 1981

After having nothing but a ticket for Springsteen to sign the night before, this time it turned out that I was over-prepared, with two items ready. One was the recently purchased biography that I had yet to start reading properly, and the other was a bootleg LP that contained a couple of rare live recordings, including his cover of Manfred Mann's *Pretty Flamingo* with a long and funny introduction. We were all told that Bruce was only going to sign one thing, and to have it ready when we approached the mini-bus window. I decided to have the bootleg signed because in my mind I thought that would be such a rare item, something I could frame, something that would be priceless. As I approached the window and said 'hi,' Bruce smiled and said "hi" in a bit of a hoarse voice, completely understandable after performing for nearly three hours. I thanked him for another great night and cheekily popped the most urgent and burning question on my mind; "Why didn't you jump into the tenth row like I asked you here last night?" As the last couple of words left my mouth, I realized how ridiculous that sounded. Who was I to hold him accountable? But it was too late. Once words leave our lips we can never pull them back. I also realized that for once, I should have heeded the advice of my father, who told me that I should "always put my brain in gear before opening my mouth," because

words, like a stone being thrown, once released cannot be pulled back, so think before you speak. It was sound advice, not for the first time ignored by me.

That ridiculous question was on its way to Springsteen's ears and there was nothing I could do to stop it. He replied in a dignified, straight forward way that explained it all: "Uhhh I dunno, just how it goes, you know." I was half joking of course, and he knew that. There was no way he was going to be held accountable and be told what to do by the likes of me, whom he is not likely to remember or see again. He was scheduled to be back in the U.S.A., to continue and finish his tour there. With those pleasantries done and feeling the pressure of those behind me, I passed him my bootleg to sign. Now, that was a mistake! A huge mistake in fact. As my so-called treasured bootleg touched his hands, he looked at it and, in a flash, almost threw it out the window back to me, uttering "I'm not signing this!"



Figure 5. The rejection
Photo from personal collection.

I did not know how to respond to that, but was incredibly disappointed. Firstly, because I did not understand why, and secondly, that was not how I wanted my interaction with Bruce to go. I later found out that Springsteen was very much against bootleggers, so much so that he took some of them to the High Court in London in 1998, in a case where he personally testified and won considerable damages (BBC 1998). He did that again in the U.S. for a similar copyright infringement case (BBC 2001). As I have since found out, for Springsteen, this is about having creative control of his own material, a principle not to be violated. How was I supposed to know that back then? I was just a new convert to his ever-growing cult-like fan base. Before I had a chance to say anything else or recover enough to think to have my book signed instead, feeling utterly devastated, I moved to let the next person behind me have their minute or so with our hero. I would have not known what to say after that encounter anyway.

Then, it hit me: I had nothing to commemorate this second meeting. Momentarily distraught and lost as what to do, I grabbed my copy of Marsh's book *Born to Run* and headed towards the back of the queue, where there were still about 10 people who had yet to meet their idol. In the process, I took off my top and put a newly bought *River* scarf (a piece of concert merchandise) around my neck, in a ridiculous hope that Bruce or his security man would not remember our encounter a few minutes earlier. That is how naïve I was, but it was worth a try. It was silly, and I should not have let my naivety get the better of me. I was nervous because I did not want his security man to stop me before I had a chance to see Bruce again and also, I was not sure if Bruce would recognize me and I was worried what he might say. This time, I just said, "hi Bruce" and just handed over the book for him to sign. He signed my book, we shook hands and that was the end of our last meeting.

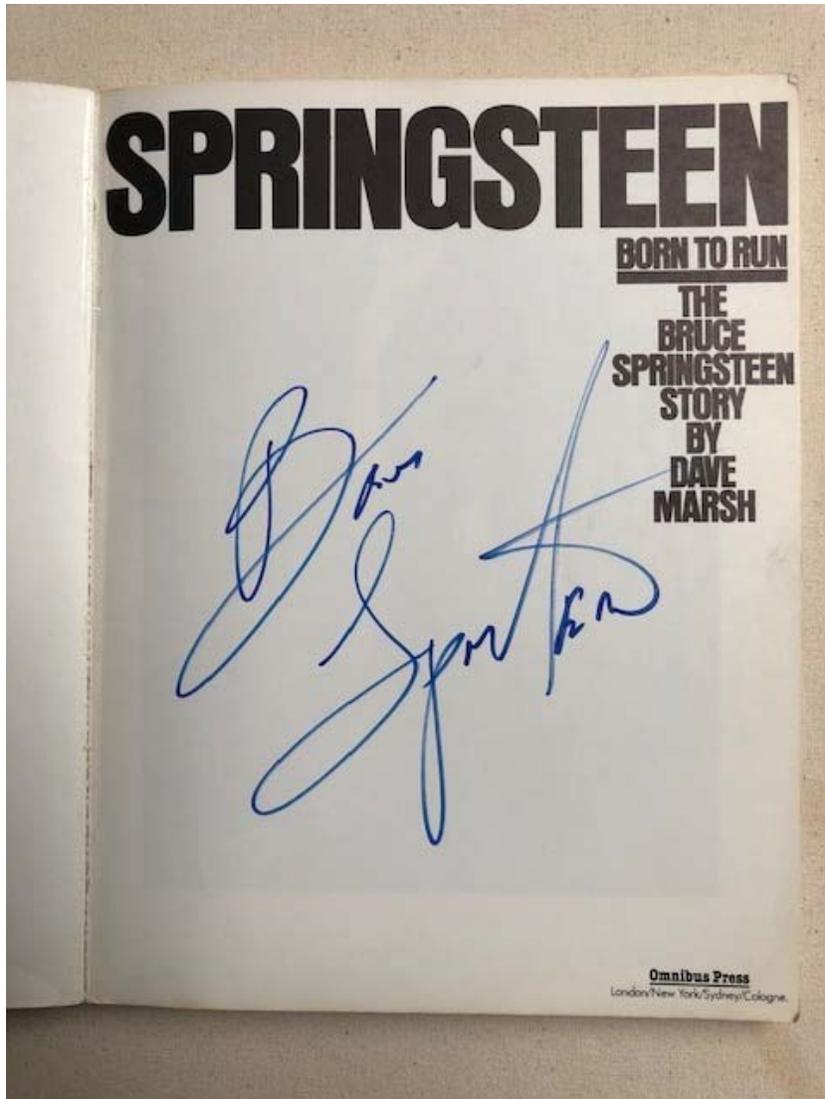


Figure 6. The coup before he was a household name.
Photo by author 2019

His security man, who had been standing discretely by the door of the open window asked us all to move back, got in the mini-bus and Bruce waved as they slowly drove off into the night.



Figure 7. Springsteen driven away smiling after the last show of 1981.

Photo by author 1981

I will never know whether Bruce knew it was me again being cheeky, but if he did, he was kind enough to entertain my antics. This all sounds pretty absurd now; given that I was the only non-white fan there, how could he not know? Either way, he was very gracious. I got my signature and a photograph with Bruce, not the kind I would have preferred, like the night before, but it was the second best and no doubt the envy of many Springsteen fans, and meaningless to those who were yet to discover his magic.

That was it. The end. The end of three crazy weeks, four concerts in three cities and twice meeting the man himself. How does anyone go home after all that? But home was waiting for us. Life had to go on. But how? We slowly made our way back to the car and did our usual routine of hot drink and a bite to eat, this time without lines of red tail lights to gaze at, as all the traffic had long gone. Then, while reminiscing and with Springsteen music blasting, we made the sixty-mile journey back to Leicester and wondered what else life had in store for us, quickly followed by the question: "When will we see Springsteen and his band again?" We knew it would be at least two or three

years before he would release another album and then tour, as that had been his pattern. Thankfully, we were wrong! Well, sort of.

6.5. Enter Nebraska

The 'high' of those three weeks in 1981 eventually wore off as the mundane took over. But life as I knew it had changed. I was not completely sure how, but I knew deep down inside that something had shifted; I just was unable to explain how. I had not even fully processed what had happened in what felt like a bit of a whirlwind. The effect of those live performances, the power of music had yet to be realized and then comprehended. That would take many more years. However, I instinctively knew that something inside me had altered and I could not explain it. All I knew was that after seeing Springsteen and his E. Street Band perform four times in 1981, I could not wait for him to get back into the studio and release another album and then TOUR. I assumed it would be around another two years before he would release a new record and then hopefully tour after (that seemed to be his pattern, taking about two years to write and record and then tour with the new record).

It was one pleasant surprise when after only a little over one year came the news that there would be a new album from Bruce Springsteen, to be released in the fall of 1982. Bracey and I could not wait. Would this new album be more like *The River*, a raucous, party like rock and roll with some deeply moving ballads or would it be more like *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, a gritty hard edge look at life; would it be similar to *Born to Run* with its Americanized 'wall of sound,' or maybe a combination of some or all of these? These were the types of questions that kept me and Bracey speculating during our weekend evenings in the local pub, where we were both beginning, unknown to us, to become what would later be known a 'Bruce bores,' affectionate term bestowed upon us by our friends for constantly discussing all things Bruce with our own brand of analysis. We could not fault them. One could only understand and truly engage in our discussions if they had witnessed his shows, like Bracey and I had. Bruce Springsteen had become simply 'Bruce' to us. Since we had met him, if ever so briefly, a familiarity and a sense of knowing 'him' rather than knowing 'of him' had settled in. As ridiculous as it may seem, we felt it difficult to explain the camaraderie, closeness, understanding of.....well, Bruce, of course!

One of the key components of my discussion with Bracey was the fact that Bruce somehow managed to make every one of his albums to date (1973-1980) sound completely and distinctly different from each other. This is still a pretty unique feat given, that most popular artists tend to churn out similar sounding stuff or more of the same, often due to music industry pressures. There were some exceptions to this at the time (i.e. David Bowie), but most big and popular artists tended to be formulaic. Springsteen seemed to be an exception. Maybe it was because he was not yet that popular, as he had only managed to have one minor Top 40 hit,²⁹ despite having just completed a sold-out tour in the U.K.. Given this, we did wonder what would he do next that could be different yet again.

Then on September 30th, 1982, much to his fans' and music critics' surprise, Springsteen did exactly that. He released an album that nobody expected. I remember standing one night in our one and only local pub, The Cedars, with Bracey telling me the song titles of all the new tracks that were on the new album. Bracey had read the track listing of the yet to be released new album in one of the weekly music papers, *The New Musical Express*, the premier music paper of that time. We had a bit of a sense that the album was going to be an acoustic type, but did not really pay too much attention to what that meant, nor did we care. We were just excited that Bruce was going to be releasing some new songs and that maybe he would be touring again soon. We both just wanted to hear more Springsteen songs and wondered (and hoped) to see him again, so much sooner than we had dared to dream only a year prior.

September 30th, 1982, the release date arrived, as did I at the local record store to buy the new album, *Nebraska*. Bracey had done the same, rushing home to take in the new release. We were both independently shocked at what we heard. This was nothing like the album we expected and unlike anything Springsteen had released before. Yes, he managed to make something completely different yet again, but it left us both in a bit of a shock. Not that we knew what to expect exactly, and it was not for lack of appreciation for this new album, but we were not expecting this! The songs on *Nebraska* were stark, bleak, and at times desperate with themes of death, moral dilemmas, loneliness, injustice, redemption and anger or pure rage, all set to sparse

²⁹ Springsteen's only Top 40 hit to date had been the single "The River," which entered the Top 40 at number 35, and the following week reached number 34, and then left the chart after only two weeks.

musical instrumentation involving mostly acoustic guitar and harmonica. The drums, keyboards, piano, lead guitars and the saxophone that had been a staple of Springsteen musicality before had all disappeared. It was nothing like the sound of *The River* or any of Springsteen's previous albums, yet in its starkness it was very powerful, probably the most powerful of his career. With the exception of one song, which sounded somewhat like the Springsteen we knew, with a 'rock' feel but played alone with a guitar, the rest were all completely unexpected in their tone, style and sound. To put it mildly, the remaining nine out of ten songs seemed to come out of 'left field.'

It was a totally unexpected move from Springsteen, given his increasing popularity. After all, the previous year he had sold out 6 nights at the Wembley Arena, a record for someone who had not had a Top 20 hit song in the U.K., and yet sold out the largest indoor concert hall in England multiple times! First shock, then disappointment - a bleak time for a 'Bruce bore.' But the new record was as worthy a consolation prize as one could imagine.

Nebraska as an album demanded to be heard, alone, with headphones on. This was no party music. In the opening song, the title track, there was quietness and stillness in the voice and the sound. Acoustic it sure was. There was hardly anything beyond an acoustic guitar and harmonica it seemed on first listening. However, the serious listening that the record demanded made me realize that these latest collections of songs from Springsteen were in fact, incredible. The depth of storytelling, the desperate situation the characters in these songs found themselves in, accompanied by the sparse instrumentation allowed or perhaps forced the listener to see the world through their eyes. The haunting music made me pay attention to the lyrics even more than I usually did because this was different. I remember wondering what on earth drove the couple in the song "Nebraska" to go on a killing spree and murder innocent civilians. What made them take those actions and then accept their fate? The line "they declared me unfit to live and into that great void my soul be hurled" had a chilling effect. Springsteen concludes with a simple, yet profound "I guess there's meanness in this world." This was as if nothing else can better describe the characters' deeds. Then, there was the song "Johnny 99," where the protagonist killed another human being after getting drunk. What was sobering here was how his circumstances of losing his job and not being able to pay his mortgage led him to murder, how he fully accepts his 99-year sentence and goes further to request a death sentence, where they can "shave off my

head and put me on that killing line.” Was there a ‘killing line’ in the United States of America, where people are waiting to be killed? Is this legal? This was some serious stuff. There is nothing more serious in this world than killing, and then accepting, even asking to be killed for that killing.

What the *Nebraska* album did for me was to cement Springsteen as a very serious songwriter, not just a fantastic live performer. What he had also become, without him realizing, was my new teacher. It was more that I was learning from him than he was teaching, and it was having a profound, transformative effect, nothing like what my schooling had done. Here was an artist in the truest sense. Springsteen could have easily turned out ten or twelve songs that were similar to or an expansion of those on *The River* but instead he went completely in the opposite direction and released an album that could be described as ‘non-commercial’ material. Springsteen could have ridden on the success of *The River* and its tour and made more money, but it was becoming clear that money was not what it was all about for him. Something spoke to me about that gesture or move on Springsteen’s part.

Somehow the songs on *Nebraska*, the stories they told, the lessons they presented were more important than being bigger, richer or more popular. How often does that happen in the music business? Artists at that stage of their career just go for it and achieve what they can, the Top 20 hits, the fame, the riches and the music business excess. In a way, this did not really surprise me. There was a sincerity in Springsteen that I saw with my own eyes the first time I met him in person; that took hold of me and has never let go. There is a genuineness and authenticity that has never really left him despite all that he went on to achieve, the riches he amassed and the adulation he received and continues to receive to this day, some thirty-eight years on. It was this sincerity and authenticity and his being present in the moment that offered a pedagogy that I was not able to master in my own career as a teacher, and had seen very little of it from my teachers up to that point. Writing this now, I am instantly reminded of the work of educators (Palmer, Snowber, Fels, Aoki and many others) who advocate for this very authentic pedagogy that many teachers lack or do not practice for various reasons. I have no doubt that if I ever have the chance to meet and chat with him again, he would

be similar in his approach as Baillie Walsh's (Gisla 2013) documentary³⁰ *Springsteen and I* demonstrates.

In retrospect, I should not have been so shocked, because the year before, he had performed the song "Follow that Dream" in a lone voice with barely any instrumentation, foreshadowing the sound that characterized the *Nebraska* album. However, even if I could have been more prepared for the sound, nothing prepared me for the content of *Nebraska*. This album was unnerving as it was bleak. That was the real shift.

6.6. The Nebraska Story

The story of the *Nebraska* album is one that is very unusual in popular music. It has been studied and commented upon sufficiently in serious manner in rock journalism and academic scholarship, with the most comprehensive account being provided by David Burke (2011), who documents the making of the album and then dissects and evaluates it. His book borrows half its title from Joseph Conrad's (2003) most famous work *Heart of Darkness*, which Francis Ford Coppola's film of the Vietnam war *Apocalypse Now* was based on. Burke's *Heart of Darkness: Bruce Springsteen's Nebraska* attempts to "claim *Nebraska* as a great American folk album" (p. 2). That is one perspective, drawing on the sparseness of instrumentation and storytelling approach, placing the album in the folk music tradition. Springsteen provides a different perspective and valuable insight himself on the *Nebraska* album, its origins, recording process and influences, first in his book *Songs* (Springsteen 2001, pp. 135-141) that contains copies of his original handwritten song list and notes, and then briefly in his autobiography *Born to Run* (Springsteen 2016, pp. 298-300). There is also commentary from a whole range of others (Humphries 1996, Graf 2015, Dolan 2012, Carlin 2012, Phillips & Masur 2013, White 2014 et. al.). It is necessary here to provide a brief overview because '*Nebraska*' had a very important role in the song "Born in the U.S.A.," which I and most of the public did not know about at the time. Steve Earle points out in his interview with Burke (2011): "*Born in the USA* can't exist without *Nebraska*" (p. 171).

³⁰ The film 'Springsteen and I' is a documentary directed by Baillie Walsh and produced by Ridley Scott, depicting the effect Springsteen has had on his fans, where the fans tell their stories and Springsteen is featured in concert and also conversing with fans.

Springsteen and his band came off a very successful U.S. and European River tour in the Fall of 1981. The tour, especially the European leg, had a profound impact on all the band members, especially the guitarist and Bruce's 'side-kick' on stage, Steven Van Zandt, who Springsteen maintains changed "permanently" after that (Springsteen 2016, p. 288).³¹ The result of the success of the tour was that for the first time in his life, Springsteen had earned enough money to buy a house, something he had not managed despite the success of his third album "Born to Run" and his simultaneous appearance on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek* in 1975, when he became the first popular music artist to be featured on both magazines in the same week. This was the first time that any established or, in Springsteen's case, up and coming 'rock star' had ever graced the covers of these magazines in the same week.³²

According to Himes (2005) and Burke (2011), Springsteen rattled around in his house, was on his own and aware of the impact of Regan's election victory and its consequences on the American working class. For the first time in his career, Springsteen made his feelings and political views known in a most public forum: from the stage. In Tempe, Arizona, at the start of *The River Tour*, he denounced the election result: "I don't know what you guys think about it, but I think it's pretty frightening" (Dolan 2012, p. 175; Springsteen 2015³³). This was Springsteen's first foray into political commentary. With this in the background and added feelings of isolation after the successful tour ended, he began writing for his next album. It was all a natural progression and process for an emerging artist.

The process Springsteen used to record these songs would be slightly different from his previous routine of taking the songs he wrote and working out the musical elements in the studio with the band, a process that took an enormous amount of studio time, energy, effort and cost. You only have to see the documentaries *Wings on Wheels*

³¹ Van Zandt was shocked when a young man in Germany asked him why his country, the U.S.A., had put their missiles in his back yard. Van Zandt had no idea, and as he later recalled the incident: "This kid accused me of putting missiles in his country, and I was like, 'What are you talking about? There's a guitar in that case, not a missile'" (Carlin 2013, p. 284). That encounter left a permanent mark on Van Zandt and would not leave his "head" (ibid). Van Zandt took time out and went on to study US history and injustice, and later founded 'Artists Against Apartheid,' a group of musicians who recorded the song 'Sun City' to protest against the Apartheid rule in South Africa.

³² Springsteen was featured on the cover of both *Time* and *Newsweek* on 20th October 1975.

³³ Springsteen can be seen making this statement on *The River Tour*, Tempe 1980, concert DVD - Springsteen (2015). *Ties That Bind: The River Collection Boxset*.

(Springsteen 2005) and *The Making of Darkness on the Edge of Town* (Springsteen 2010a) to see the arduous process Springsteen and the band went through to record both those albums. To improve and assist this process of Springsteen demonstrating his songs in the studio to the band members, he asked his technician to get a simple recording tape machine where he could transfer the tunes from his head onto a cassette player. He would then play that cassette with all the songs at once for the band members to get a good sense of what he was after. Often in life indeterminant factors take good ideas and intentions in a different direction and reshape whatever you had in mind for better or for worse. In this case, it was for better, as Springsteen was to learn through his frustrations of not getting what he wanted in the recording studio his band's input.

This recording process is well documented (Himes 2005; Marsh 1986; Buskin 2012; Dolan 2012; Carlin 2012; Springsteen, 2001 & 2016). For the first time in his life, Springsteen decided to record demos for the band at home and then move straight into the recording studio. What actually happened was something no one could have predicted: not Springsteen, not the band, not his manager or the record company, let alone anybody in the outside world. Once the band worked on Springsteen's homemade demos, Springsteen along with others, and especially Steve Van Zandt, felt that the band versions of the songs had lost the intimacy, that stories were better told by the lone voice of Springsteen, exactly as it had been captured on that Teac Tascam four track recorder in his bedroom. After struggling with what to do, it was Van Zandt that was instrumental in urging Springsteen to release ten of those songs as they were into an album, which has now become something of a classic. *Nebraska* went on to influence many artists since its 1982 release. These include artists such as David Bowie and Tom Morello of the then upcoming and coming Rage Against the Machine outfit.

Nebraska went on to be a moderate success in term of sales. Given its somber tone and very little publicity, it reached number three on the U.K. charts and "went on to shift some 800,000 units in America alone, and reached number 4 on the *Billboard* chart" (Burke 2011, p 69). However, a key decision made during the compiling of the ten songs for the album was to leave off a certain song called "Born in the U.S.A." There were many reasons for this. Firstly, in its original acoustic form, the song was not rated by Springsteen's manager Jon Landau: "it didn't even seem like a particularly good song" (Marsh 1996, p. 93); he thought the song "just didn't fit" (Burke 2011, p. 63) with the

overall theme of the album, which did include a song with a reference to the difficulties of one of two brothers having difficulty readjusting to his American lifestyle after serving in Vietnam. However, that song, called 'Highway Patrolman' is more about a moral dilemma of a policeman dealing with a family member breaking the law than that of Vietnam veterans' experience. Another reason why the song was left off *Nebraska* was because Springsteen and the band ended up making a version that generated a landmark experience that was new to all concerned in the process.

The original version of "Born in the U.S.A.," despite being left out of the final selection of songs for *Nebraska* can be heard in its original form, the acoustic version that was on that cassette tape that was carried around in Springsteen's pocket for some of weeks. It was officially released on *Tracks* (Springsteen 1998), the four CD compilation that consisted of mostly unreleased material from Springsteen's career up to 1998. This original version sounds completely different from the title track of the album that made Springsteen a superstar and a household name, adding to the already mixed feelings of ardent 'cult like' fans (old and new like myself), who wanted to keep Springsteen a hidden secret, yet also wanted the world to see what we had already seen. Springsteen becoming a superstar generated a time of mixed blessings. Gone were the days where I would be able to wait at the stage door and meet the man who just emotionally and physically moved me, made me think and entertained me in a way like no other rock star I had seen.

Long story short, '*Nebraska*' was released and it came as a complete yet welcome surprise to all sets of ears that listened to it for the first time. Everything about the record caught virtually everybody off guard. From its black and white cover³⁴ with only the lettering offering a touch of red to the sparse and desperate sound, it was a bit of a shock to see this new side of Springsteen, a side that seemed very deep and questioned much more than he had already done on previous records. However, if you saw what I saw and felt what I felt on the 9th song of the evening of May 20, 1981, you had no choice but to love the album. It was not the 'feel good' party songs mixed with some thoughtful reflections of *The River*, no, this was straight up deep into your heart,

³⁴ For a detailed account of how the cover was chosen to fit the 'mood' of the record see Burke (2011, pp. 65-67). Springsteen did not "want his image" on the cover and preferred "something more evocative" (Burke 2011, p. 65).

mind and soul with goose bumps galore at the sadness and darkness that enveloped most of the characters and their circumstances.

Like most Springsteen fans (I was now firmly in this camp), I was a little disappointed at first by the thought of a new album not sounding anything like an extension of his previous work. It may have been something no Springsteen fan had heard before, but it was Springsteen through and through. It was Springsteen displaying and fitting into the category of 'artist' as best defined by the American writer Paul Auster, who claims that "all artists are damaged people" (Auster 2012). Auster maintains that "truly, happy, successful people don't need to make art. Those who are damaged in one way or another are the ones who feel the necessity." Damaged or not, the state of Springsteen at the time had concerned his manager, as it was later revealed that the "overwhelming gloom" in the demos "made him worry a bit about his friend's "emotional state" (Carlin, 2013, p. 294). As Jon Landau himself put it, "these songs were so dark that it concerned me on a friendship level" (Marsh 1996, p. 92). While those close to Springsteen were concerned for him, and critics hailed him as an artist, he was certainly opening my mind, heart and moving my soul in a way that no one or no other thing had done before. Music was beginning to crack open doors that life and schooling had not done thus far.

This was Springsteen at his best when it came to telling stories filled with angst and heart wrenching on one hand, with soulful reflections and questioning on the other. The title track "*Nebraska*" which was based on the true story of Charlie Starkweather and his girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate, a story that the film director Terrance Malik has turned into a film called 'Badlands'. Springsteen had seen the film and sometime after called up "Ninette Beaver, a Nebraska journalist who wrote a book about Fugate" (White 2014, p. 105; Marsh 1996, p. 86). By all accounts, Springsteen had a lengthy telephone conversation with Beaver, no doubt to gain a fuller understanding before he put his pen to paper in his notebook, a notebook similar to the one fans got a glimpse of when the *Darkness on The Edge of Town* Box set was released (Springsteen 2009), that contains parts and full first drafts of lyrics.

I did not know it at the time, but Steve Pond, reviewing the album for Rolling Stone (1996) in 1982 declared that "This is the bravest of Springsteen's six records; it's also his most startling, direct and chilling" (p. 142). He went on: "*Nebraska* is an acoustic

triumph, a basic folk album on which Springsteen has stripped his art down to its core” (p. 143). Humphries (1996) reflected: “*Nebraska* just stripped the carcass down to the bone, there was no flesh on the album, it is raw, exposed and intimate, dark and pensive” (p. 45). The New York Times described it as Springsteen’s

...most personal record, and his most disturbing... It’s been a long time since a mainstream rock star made an album that asks such tough questions and refuses to settle for easy answers- let alone an album suggesting that perhaps there are no answers.

(Graff 2005, p. 255).

I had not seen any of these reviews at the time, but many years later they validated my own reactions and thoughts I had listening to it back in 1982.

For me, Springsteen had managed to get to that place in my body where music, like all great works of art, does its magic, penetrating deep into your soul. On May 20th 1981, I first experienced that live in concert. With *Nebraska*, he was doing this to this fan who cared to listen to his record, creating from a great distance the feeling that he was sitting opposite me in my lightly lit room. As I put the needle to record for the first time, I had no choice but to sit and listen. This record demanded my full attention. This was no music to dance to, cook to, paint to or anything else of the sort. *Nebraska* could or would not pass as background music.

6.7. Before Springsteen

Before I came across Springsteen, I had come across Springsteen indirectly, only I did not know it at the time. Prior to hearing Springsteen on the radio in the Fall of 1980 and before seeing Springsteen live in concert in 1981, I had come across three hit singles from the U.K. charts in the late 70’s that would pave my way to the man himself.

Before I had heard Springsteen sing or play a single note of his compositions, I had in fact come across and was a fan of his work. I remember Manfred Mann reviving their 1960’s career with an interesting song called “Blinded by the Light,” which went to number one on the *American Billboard* charts in 1976 and was a Top 10 hit in Britain at the time. Little did I know that this was a song Springsteen had written and was the opening track of his first album, *Greetings From Asbury Park*. Manfred Mann’s version sounded completely different musically, but contained the same ‘Dylan-esque’ verbiage

that gave credence to the early comparisons of Springsteen to Bob Dylan, a comparison that was actively promoted by Columbia records at the start of his career. Springsteen later referred to this by suggesting that Dylan was only thirty something and scarcely old, so a new Dylan was hardly necessary.

After “Blinded by the Light,” came Patti Smith with “Because of the Night,” an absolute scorcher of a song in the midst of the Punk era, in 1978. This was a Top 10 smash hit in the U.K. and again, unknown to me and many others at the time, this was a song Springsteen wrote and then discarded when he was recording his ‘*Darkness on the Edge of Town*’ album because it did not fit the overall theme of that album. Springsteen later revealed that he realized he was never going to finish this song and Jimmy Iovine, who was working with Springsteen and Patti Smith at the same time in a producer capacity suggested that he give it to Patti Smith. She did take it and made a few minor changes to the lyrics that made it a “better song” (Springsteen 2013), which resulted in her only Top 10 U.K. hit to date. Springsteen still performs his version with his original lyrics live in concert after all these years.

In 1979 came a sultry, smooth, sensual and slow single that reached number two on the U.S. Billboard chart and became a U.K. Top 40 hit for the Pointer Sisters. The song “Fire” was unlike anything else on Radio One at the time, a time when the British airwaves were dominated by Punk Rock and Disco. I went out and bought the 45rpm single straight away and I still have it as a memento after all these years. This was a song that Springsteen had written for Elvis Presley to record, but he never got to do it. I had no idea at the time that this song was also written by Springsteen. Had I known that these three songs were written by him, I might have gone out and checked out his music before 1980 when “Hungry Heart,” the lead single of his album *The River*, forced me to take notice. I was obviously drawn to Springsteen, albeit subliminally, before I ever set eyes on him as a performer and recording artist. This had not happened before. The music of Fleetwood Mac, Boston and the likes were all introduced to me through their own recordings, which made me go out and see them live in concert. Springsteen was already in my subconscious before I ever heard him play a single note.

6.8. The Vinyl Years

By the time I had heard *The River* album, digested every lyric and then completed my collection with all Springsteen's previous albums, I had a good connection to his songs. They made me see and often question myself, my life, my father's life, love, difficulties, possibilities, sadness and joy. What I also sensed was the power of music and what it was able to do, but I did not reflect on it in any critical way. These were all things that were immediate and often personal to me.

The first album that I bought of his music was *The River* in the fall of 1980, after hearing the radio play of the lead single "Hungry Heart" on BBC Radio One. Bracy was also becoming interested in Springsteen's music at the same time and we began discussing his music in a general manner as we had done before with other artists that we saw together. We realized that we both had some kind of emotional connection to Springsteen's *River* album and because of that connection I went searching through his back catalogue and first bought *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, and then his most famous to that date *Born to Run*, before purchasing his first two, *Greetings From Asbury Park* and its follow up, *The Wild, The Innocent and the E. Street Shuffle*.

After some listening to these albums, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* quickly emerged as my favorite, maybe because I saw aspects of myself in some of his songs. I certainly saw my father in the song "The Factory." I had seen the anger in my father that Springsteen sang about in "Adam Raised a Cain:" "My daddy worked his whole life looking for nothing but the pain, now he walks these empty room looking for something to blame." That was my father's story; my father, who had done his best for his wife and children, but was always subject to circumstances outside his control. No wonder the line, "We inherit the sins, we inherit the pain" hit so close to my father's and my home.

Initially the album *Born to Run*, Springsteen's most famous to that point, seemed a little too distant for me. It felt very American, and America was far from the streets of Leicester, U.K., the town I had grown up in and lived in at the time. Lines like 'The screen door slams' from the opening track "Thunder Road" lacked direct reference, as in England there were virtually no homes with 'screen doors,' and I had yet to visit the U.S., to see for myself what he meant. "Highways jammed with broken heroes," from "Born to Run" did not resonate with my British experience of the 'motorways.' Same thing with

the last track “Jungleland,” and its reference to Exxon signs above gas stations; my reference for this was ‘petrol stations.’ Add to the mix a different, Phil Spector type of ‘Wall of Sound,’ the music seemed very.... well, American.

The album *Darkness on the Edge of Town* on the other hand, had a very different feel. It seemed more relatable, even though it had its own cultural references to ‘7 Eleven’ stores and ‘porches’ in front of houses. The songs on this album just felt more personal. They seemed to deal with some harsh realities of life. The sound was pared down when compared to the album *Born to Run* and felt ‘grittier.’ I was drawn to Springsteen’s songs through their lyrics first and foremost, and this album spoke to me in a very personal manner. Even though rhythm and melody entice the ears, for me, the power is usually in the lyrics that tell the story. To this day, I believe *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is his best album (Thindal 2018) along with *Tunnel of Love*. However, back in 1981 the songs of *The River* and *Darkness on the Edge of Town* had captured my attention enough to want to see him perform live.

I had no idea what it would lead to and certainly did not think it would change my life in any meaningful way. If only Michael Hann of The Guardian had written his piece below in 1981 instead of three years ago, and I had come across it, then maybe, just maybe, I might have had some clue as to what was coming my way, and I would have had a better sense of Springsteen’s mission when he went on stage:

we come out and deliver the straight dope to our crowd as best we can. It’s coming on stage with the idea: OK, well the stakes that are involved this evening are quite high. I don’t know exactly who’s in the crowd. But I know that my life was changed in an instant by something that people thought was purely junk – pop music records. And you can change someone’s life in three minutes with the right song. I still believe that to this day.

(Hann 2016a, para.)

Surely a song cannot change someone’s life, can it? This is what I thought prior to 1981, but that is exactly what a song did to me three years later, in June 1984. Even though popular music had not affected me that much before 1981, little did I know that it would alter the course of my life on a larger scale than I could ever have imagined. All of that started in my old living room at lunch time on June 4, 1984, when Bruce Springsteen became my first proper ‘professor,’ and quite the pedagogue, just like he did with David Brooks (2009) and I imagine, countless others.

Chapter 7. The 'Other' Education

Learning

In the fall of 1986, Springsteen released his first ever cover version of a song written by another artist. On November 10, 1986, the song "War" hit the radio airways in Britain. It was Bruce Springsteen and the E. Street Band's cover version of Edwin Star's number one hit from 1970. "War" reached number 19 on the U.K. Singles charts and number 8 on the U.S. Billboard charts. It was a modest success for Springsteen, nothing like what he had the previous year with singles from the *Born in the U.S.A.* album, but that is not what is important here. This was the first song to be released by Springsteen in over a year since the enormous success of the *Born in the U.S.A.* album that had generated "seven Top Ten" hit singles (White 2014 p. 124, Buskin 2012 p. 282) and went on to "become one of the best-selling albums of all time" (Humphries 1996 p.57). However, none of this is significant here. What is imperative is the video that accompanied this release. The video of "War,"³⁵ directed by Arthur Rosato (1986) contained the most significant message that Springsteen had ever officially put out on record, a message more powerfully reflected in the video that accompanied it. It was and still is the most powerful video Springsteen has released to date, with a message that rings as true today as it did then, 33 years ago. Up to that point in his career, Springsteen had made six specific videos to accompany new (released) songs, five of them in support of singles from the album *Born in the U.S.A.* and one for the song "Atlantic City" from the album *Nebraska*. The video that accompanied his version of the song "War" was his most complete book ended piece of video film to date, with a very powerful message conveyed not only through visual images, but also through his monologue at the beginning of a most incredibly powerful live performance of the song.

Springsteen's "furious cover" (Carlin 2012, p. 330) of "War" is in line with Edwin Star's version, but much more fierce and powerful, not only with his singing but also with the accompanying dominant instrumentation. Springsteen has always been a very powerful performer, and by 1986 I had witnessed him perform live in concert ten times over 5 years. I saw him four times on *The River Tour* in 1981 and six times on the *Born*

³⁵ The 'war' video can be viewed on the official Bruce Springsteen Vivo release here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mn91L9goKfQ>

in the U.S.A. Tour in 1985, his entire U.K. leg of the concert tour in support of the blockbuster album of the same name. As a result, I had formed a clear view of his capability as a phenomenal live performer. That said, the video for the song “War” and his live performance that accompanied it, still had a huge impact on me. In order to fully understand that, a short review of the video is necessary. It was not just the raw emotion of his voice, his inner rage coming through so viscerally. It was also the added visual images that start and end the video and his remarks aligned to specific images related to war at the beginning of the video, all that combining to make it Springsteen’s most complete, powerful and political video to date.

Springsteen’s “War” video opens with a blank black screen and silence that is quickly interrupted with a voice that sounds like a newscaster, stating: “acknowledging that two to four thousand troops are now in Vietnam...” By the end of this sentence the first scene fades in and breaks the darkness. It shows what could be a father and his son sitting at a table in front of a television set, watching the news. As the newscaster continues with an over the shoulder caption of a picture of a helicopter, the two adults appear to be transfixed to the TV newscast and do not utter a word as they occasionally touch parts of a meal that is in front of them. The newscaster continues:

But the administration at this point stresses that these forces are not in combat but serving as military advisors to the army of the Republic of South Vietnam. In other news, President Johnson announced tonight in a televised address to the nation, that American fighting forces in Southeast Asia would increase from seventy-five to one hundred and twenty-five thousand men, with further increases would be ordered immediately.

(Rosato 1986)

Towards the end of the last sentence, the camera zooms in to the picture in caption on the TV screen and the black and white still shot of the helicopter transform into live color film. We hear helicopter noise and see the helicopter nearing a landing, soldiers in full combat gear jumping onto the ground of a remote countryside. As the helicopter takes off, a black and white still picture of what appears to be a Vietnamese mother and a child whose faces are virtually touching each other comes into view. The figures are looking up into the sky. The tearful expression on the mother’s face is that of sheer fear and helplessness. As the black and white photograph fades, color footage of bombs being dropped from an aeroplane onto green rural countryside void of urban dwellings or military installations emerges, almost suggesting that what the woman and

the child were looking at and waiting for were bombs to fall on or around them. These images portray so poignantly the closeness of distant bombs being dropped indiscriminately, having real and devastating impact on ordinary lives. The newscaster's commentary now in the background, continues: "And this morning, Richard M. Nixon was sworn in 37th president of the United States. In Vietnam this week, 186 Americans have been killed and 1237 wounded as fighting continues."

Meanwhile, the images continue with a quick shot of a soldier jumping out of a helicopter, rapidly fading to what looks like an elder female with clear distress on her face hugging a younger female. As this new black and white film footage first fades into view, you first hear Springsteen's voice speaking: "If you grew up in the sixties you grew up with war on TV every night. A war your friends were involved in." The image on the TV screen at this point shows an older Asian female pulling a younger Asian woman away as the younger woman appears to be shouting something while in distress. As Springsteen continues his introductory remarks in the background the images continue to fill the TV screen: soldiers walking in full combat gear through some (Vietnamese) countryside, soldiers struggling to carry a body of a fellow soldier, in what looks like Vietnam or Southeast Asia. As Springsteen says "and eh, I wanna do this song tonight for all the young people out there," the images change to what seems like Central America, with young men and women in civilian clothes practicing drill movements with rifles. Springsteen continues:

If you're in your teens, I remember a lot of my friends that were seventeen or eighteen, we didn't have much of a chance to think about how we felt about a lot of things, and eh, the next time they're going to be looking at you, and you're gonna need a lot of information to know what you're gonna wanna do.

(1986)

As he says "seventeen or eighteen," there is a close up of two teenagers, a boy and a girl who appear to be from South or Central America. The footage then moves to a black and white photograph of soldiers smoking a cigarette, and as it zooms in, we see a human skull, presumably a prize collected and proudly displayed for the photographer. This image is followed by a moving still shot of a soldier being dragged through some water, presumably towards safety. It is clear that he is being rescued. The last two still shots, before Springsteen emerges into the picture completing his introduction, are of

American soldiers with their personal belongings on their shoulders, looking ready to leave for a military mission. One can only assume that they are heading to Vietnam or other part of South East Asia.

The final image is what appears to be a young mother with a child from Central or South America, looking straight into the camera as Springsteen emerges through the fade and into the picture. I could not help but wonder if Springsteen was referencing the atrocities that were going on in Central and South America at the time with that last still image, atrocities that the rock band U2 sang about on their "Bullet the Blue Sky" song after their lead singer Bono visited Nicaragua. Completing his introduction, Springsteen says: "Because in 1985, blind faith in your leaders or anything will get you killed." With barely a pause or an opportunity for what he said to sink in, he adds: "Cause what I'm talking about here is... [at this point Springsteen erupts ferociously into the opening line...] WAR! What is it good for? Absolutely nothing! Say it again!" Before you can process everything that has been said, Springsteen has already launched into an extremely powerful performance, clearly enunciating each lyric of the original song, words that emphasise the futility and consequences of war and its aftermath, taped to his left forearm, a sign of times before teleprompters replaced strategical placing of words on body parts. The song starts rather unusually with a question, which is immediately answered and then acts as the chorus, "War, what is it good for? Absolutely nothing!" Just on the off chance you did not get it the first time, the same line is repeated immediately. This chorus is repeated throughout the song between verses:

Oh, war, I despise
'Cause it means destruction of innocent lives
War means tear to thousands of mothers' eyes
When their sons go off to fight and lose their lives

(Whitfield and Strong 1970)

After the chorus, Springsteen goes on:

Oh, war, has shattered many young man's dreams
Made him disabled, bitter and mean
Life is much too short and precious to spend fighting wars these days
War can't give life it can only take it away, ooh

The lyrics for the whole song are worth reviewing to get the full understanding and the impact of this Norman Whitfield and Barret Strong song, as is the Springsteen

performance and video (Springsteen 2001; 2010). Written by Whitfield and Strong, it was intended for the Motown group The Temptations, who had already had many hits, such as “Papa was a rolling stone,” “Cloud nine” and “Just my imagination.” Whitfield and Strong were the writing team behind many other Motown hits songs such as Marvin Gaye’s “I heard it through the Grapevine.” As the story goes, ‘War’ was originally written for The Temptations, but Motown executives felt somewhat nervous about releasing such a hard-hitting anti-war song at the height of the Vietnam war, which was exactly the point. So, Edwin Star, who had only a minor hit to his name, took up the offer and the song became a number one hit in the U.S. in 1970, and reached number three in the U.K. in the same year.³⁶

After the introduction, so as not to serve as any kind of distraction, there are no visual images aside from Springsteen’s blistering live performance and footage of each band member fully committed to the song. Nothing is taken away from the performance itself, full of energy, raw emotion and the power of rock ‘n’ roll. At times, you see the veins in Springsteen’s neck bulge to the point where one could easily fear for his safety, so intensely he is committed to getting his point across about war’s ravages.

As Springsteen ends his singing, the video footage fades away from him on stage, back to a helicopter with a Red Cross symbol landing and covering the whole TV screen, which then fades to the original image where the father and son are sitting watching the newscast on their TV screen from the beginning of the video. Then, as the camera pulls away from the TV screen showing images of soldiers carrying another soldier on a stretcher, the sound transforms from that of a helicopter into that of a heartbeat. What comes next is almost the single most effective image of any Springsteen video, showing only the father sitting alone at the same table with his cup of drink, newspaper and a plateful of uneaten food, staring intently not at his TV screen as at the start of the video, but looking transfixed at the empty chair where his son had sat, implying his son had gone to war. The final image on the TV screen before the whole video fades into complete silence and darkness is that of five soldiers carrying another soldier on a stretcher.

³⁶ For additional information on the history of this song see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_\(The_Temptations_song\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_(The_Temptations_song))

The television set is clearly from the sixties, with its internal antenna and two manual dials. There is no question that this part of the video is representing the Vietnam war and the loss of a son to an American father. I find this to be the single most powerful video of Springsteen's career to date with its subtle and not so subtle images bookending his formidable live performance footage from the last concerts at Los Angeles Colosseum that brought the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour to a close on October 2, 1985 (Carlin 2013, p. 327, Dolan 2012, p. 228). A close look at Springsteen's singing reveals anger and rage in his face, anger at the futility of war, and as he later revealed, an understanding that he could have easily ended up in Vietnam had he not decided to do "whatever it took" to avoid the draft (Springsteen 2016 p.100). Jaffee (1987) made an interesting observation regarding how Springsteen's version of this "anti-Vietnam hit" was a refreshing change, in that it was a rare song concomitantly making a "political statement" and being able to break into the mainstream radio's Top 10 at a time when the charts were mainly filled with what he called "silly loves songs." He observed that Springsteen "pretty much tells his draftable fans not to be taken in by Washington's lies" (p.19).

The "War" video had a profound effect on me in 1986, and one line from the introduction that still stands out for me after over 30 years is "Next time they're going to be looking at you." If there was ever a question about it, Springsteen foreshadowed that there was going to be a next time for war, destruction, for lives lost. Those nine words had an enormous effect on me. Did Springsteen know something I did not, or was he merely speculating and warning future generations to be more informed before they enlisted to serve their country. Unknown to me, Springsteen had been reading Henry Steele Commager's *A Pocket History of the United States* and "Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* (Springsteen 2016, p. 291), two books that detail the role war has played in the history of America, of which I had not a clue. However, I had already started to question the whole notion of the Vietnam war and the American soldier's experience two years prior as a result of Springsteen's song "Born in the U.S.A." This video renewed that mission and took my life in a direction I never envisioned. I found the lyrics of the song "War" so incredibly profound and moving that I began to explore the whole notion of armed military conflict. At this stage, I did not know that I was educating myself by following my interest. I had yet to come across beliefs

that “students’ interest is by far the single most important ingredient of their education” (MacKinnon 2013, p.17).

7.1. Falklands War

Growing up in England meant that you did not have any real connection to Vietnam. My experience was very different to that espoused by Springsteen when he said, “If you grew up in the sixties, you grew up with war on TV.” I do not recall growing up with ‘war on TV,’ but maybe that was partly because I was a little too young. Turning a teenager in the seventies, I do not remember too much about Vietnam being part of mainstream discourse in England. It was mainly seen as some distant war that did not have anything to do with England. That all changed in 1982, when the Falklands war became a reality. This time it involved Britain directly, even though the war was to be fought thousands of miles away, the only factor similar to Vietnam. It still felt a little like a distant reality and did not really concern the likes of me, even though for a few months the Falklands became the dominant discourse in the British media and British politics. The Falklands war had its controversy, due to the widely viewed as deliberate sinking of the Argentinian naval ship ‘*The Belgrano*,’ which caused the loss of 323 Argentinian lives. This represented nearly half of all Argentinian military losses for the whole conflict. ‘*The Belgrano*’ was outside and sailing away from the ‘200 nautical mile exclusion zone’ set by the British government when it was attacked. The incident led to some ministerial resignations in the Thatcher government. Despite all this, I did not give it too much thought at the time, as I felt I could not do anything about the Falklands war. It was out of my hands, as it were.

In 1984, after hearing “Born in the U.S.A.” I started to imagine the pain of the British veterans of the Falklands war, like ex-soldier Simon Weston, who became the first visible face of the war in Britain. Weston (1989) survived the Falklands war, where he suffered serious first degree burns and facial disfigurement when his navy ship ‘*Sir Galahad*’ was bombed by Argentinian Skyhawk jets. From Weston’s platoon of thirty men, twenty-two died. Weston was one of the lucky ones, although one would be hard pressed to believe that seeing the aftermath of his horrific injuries and disfiguration, even after several reconstructive surgeries. I guess being alive, albeit completely disfigured and unrecognisable is better than being dead. You only have to see his photograph “At the Falklands parade, December 1982” (Weston 1989, p. 125c) to understand such a

statement. Weston was hailed a national hero and paraded around as the resilient spirit of the British. I wondered about the difficulties he must have experienced. He was the 'lucky one.' What about other returning soldiers from the Falklands War, the ones who were not so fortunate? What about the families of those who never came back alive or never came back at all? The war was hailed as a huge victory by the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who had been instrumental in taking Britain to war with Argentina. But that was not the complete story. With my curiosity heightened and my empathy growing for veterans of war, all thanks to imagining the experience of that returning American Veteran from Vietnam in the song "Born in the U.S.A.," I began to take a deeper interest in such matters.

In 1988, as the made for television BBC film *Tumbledown* (Eyre 1988) was due to air, it was surrounded by controversy because the British Government insisted that some scenes should be cut, as they were unfit for the British people. The film was eventually screened on television with around 11 to 13 seconds cut out. That apparently was much less than what the British Ministry of Defence wanted. The film starred the then relatively unknown Colin Firth, who played the lead character of Lieutenant Robert Lawrence, a Falkland's war hero who was nearly killed at the Battle of Mount Tumbledown in the Falklands. Lawrence was shot in the head and lost 43% of his brain, becoming wheelchair bound. Lawrence told his story in a book written jointly with his father, who was an ex-military officer himself (Lawrence & Lawrence 1988). The film portrays his story, raising serious questions about the Falklands war, the treatment of the returning injured veterans and the British government's censorship demands.

What *Tumbledown* did for me was to expose me to the actual real-life horrors and the real-life torment involved in killing another human being. The film was based on a true story, from a time and events I could instantly relate to. There are three scenes that really stood out and have stayed with me to this day. First was the visual demonstration of the devastating effect of a high velocity bullet as it shatters and goes through a tomato. One could easily imagine what that bullet, designed to hit and shatter on impact, could do to the human body. The second was where Lawrence recalls how hard it was to kill an Argentine soldier, how it was not like in the movies. That was the most disturbing scene in the whole film: the Argentinian soldier lying wounded begging to be saved, yet Lawrence kept stabbing him with his bayonet, which broke during the process, and Lawrence stabbing him with the broken bayonet until the soldier died. He

would later recall: “he would not just die.”³⁷ To actually kill another human being was nowhere near as easy as it was made out to be in military training or understood in general, and certainly not how it is usually portrayed in the movies. The dramatization of that scene was horrific, especially knowing that it was true, and that it actually occurred. The third scene was where Lawrence, while recovering from his injuries, tells his parents that the war “was not worth it.” I believe there were some issues around that scene and it may have been one that the British Ministry of Defence wanted to cut from the film. *Tumbledown* added to my growing intrigue about war and armed conflict. As powerful as it was, it was not nearly as influential as what was soon heading my way. By then, I had become like the little boy in John Holt’s (1967) example³⁸, who just could not get enough and was learning so much from everything he could get his hands on, only I was now relying on that other teacher, the one that Marshall McLuhan (1967) had predicted would do more teaching than any school.

7.2. Fourth of July

Little did I know that Oliver Stone, the American film director, was working on his second film about Vietnam. His first was the much-acclaimed ‘*Platoon*,’ partly based on Stone’s own personal experience as an infantry soldier in Vietnam. Stone was the first Vietnam veteran to write and direct a major Hollywood movie about the Vietnam war when he made *Platoon*, which earned him an Academy award for Best Director, alongside awards for ‘Best Picture,’ ‘Best Sound Mixing’ and ‘Best Film Editing.’

On December 20, 1989, Universal Pictures released *Born on the Fourth of July*, starring Tom Cruise and directed by Oliver Stone. Unknown to me at the time, the movie was based on the autobiography of Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic. Oliver Stone was so struck with Kovic’s story that he made a movie about it, involving Kovic in writing the screenplay, which earned them an Academy Award nomination. I believe that involving Kovic in such major way gave the film its authenticity and power. It was, and I believe still is, Tom Cruise’s best performance on film, and earned him a much-deserved Golden

³⁷ This scene can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lDzzVsKEQk>, at the 6.45 minute mark of the 11 minute battle scene.

³⁸ See page 10 in the Introduction of this dissertation.

Globe for Best Actor.³⁹ It was the first film about Vietnam that took a different perspective in telling the real story of a deeply patriotic young American, who proudly enlists to serve his country, goes off to fight in Vietnam where he is seriously injured, and returns home to receive medical treatment. Despite the appalling conditions of the V.A. (Veterans Administration) hospital and learning that he will never walk again due to being paralysed from the waist down, he remains very patriotic and proud of his service to his country. This is the first half the story. What follows is Kovic's transformation from a patriotic, pro-war soldier to an anti-war veteran who joins the Vietnam Veterans Against the War to protest against armed conflict. Between Stone and Kovic's screenplay, Stone's direction and Cruise's acting, the film vividly demonstrates the complexity of the Vietnam war, its aftermath on veterans and their families, and its impact on American society at large. Also, the film touches on the politics of the time, as Kovic is shown protesting and trying to be heard at the 1972 Republican National Convention. Kovic eventually gets to speak at the Democratic Convention in 1976. I found the film and its story so compelling and moving. I also found it uncanny how Kovic's story was similar to that of the protagonist of the song "Born in the U.S.A" who after fighting for his country, comes back to find a country that seems as if it does not care very much for him, transforming his patriotism from his younger days.

The film *Born on the Fourth of July* was instrumental in pushing further my intrigue about the whole notion of war and its effects on society. Key to this was the opportunity to see a real Vietnam veteran deal with the aftermath of that devastating war and the toll it took on American citizens, on those who participated in the actual war as soldiers and family members, friends, and society at large. Some of the same themes had been touched upon by a couple of Hollywood films earlier. *Coming Home*, which starred Jane Fonda and Jon Voight, dealt with the difficulty of a veteran readjusting to life back home in America. The first half of *The Deer Hunter*, starring Robert De Niro and Meryl Streep, also touched on some aspects of a veteran having difficulty readjusting when back home. However, no major Hollywood film had yet tackled the transformation of a 'gung ho' pro-war proud patriotic Vietnam veteran into an active anti-war activist, a change born out of his experiences and treatment after returning from military service. That was new and was very powerful for me. But I needed more, and it came in a very

³⁹ Cruise missed out on an Academy Award for Best Actor to Daniel Day Lewis for his stunning performance in 'My Left Foot.'

moving BBC television documentary. Television was taking over and educating me like my schooling had not. This was the new teacher Marshal McLuhan warned about, and it was real, not at all “amusing” in the way Postman (1986) suggested.

7.3. Haunted Heroes

Trying to relax after a typical day of teaching at a college of further education in South Yorkshire, where I was now established and on the verge of becoming senior lecturer, I was flipping through the only 4 television channels available without satellite provision (that had yet to take hold in the U.K.), and accidentally came across a BBC Two documentary called *Haunted Heroes*. The title was intriguing enough to warrant some interest. In the first few seconds it became clear that it was a documentary worth recording and quickly set the VCR to record (in 1990 there were no digital PVR recording provisions, but a VHS video recorder was heaven-sent). I had no idea what to expect, but I knew from the title and the introductory remarks, it would be interesting. It was a documentary about four American Vietnam veterans who live in ‘self-imposed’ exile as ‘outcasts’ (Isaacs 1985) in their own country. Vietnam veterans, living in self-imposed exile and outcasts in the country of their birth: how can this not be interesting to me after seeing *Born on the Fourth of July*?

Haunted Heroes is a documentary from a BBC series called *A World About Us*. This particular documentary was a ‘special’ from the series, originally screened on the 10th year anniversary of the end of the Vietnam war, on October 14, 1985, which of course I had missed. On this occasion in early 1990, my reaction was “Thank God for BBC repeats!” In the film, we see four American Vietnam veterans unable to return to live in and among the society they were from before going to Vietnam. Instead, they now live on the fringes of American society along with hundreds of others, in the wilderness of remote forests and mountains on the pacific coast of America. The British actor Robert Powell narrates the film: “They risked their lives and returned to a country that rejected them” (Isaacs 1985). The four veterans that are the focus of the film are Steve, Bruce, Jake and Fred. They tell of their horrific experiences of Vietnam, the training in preparation for Vietnam, the Special Ops mission they were involved in and how they were treated on their return to the land that they fought for. It provided fascinating insight into their personal experience, which had received little coverage by any form of mainstream media. Steve describes the special training that made him a great ‘killing

machine,' which by his own admission he was 'good at.' He also highlights that the humiliation and degrading treatment he received as part of his training was nothing short of abuse. A very similar testimony is provided by Ron Kovic (1996, 2016), who details humiliation and abuse in his training.

It was both fascinating and frightening to hear how Steve nearly killed his own mother after he returned, using a killing method he was trained in. He had warned his mother not to wake him up from his sleep like she used to when he was a child, by tickling his toes at the end of the bed. This was the situation he feared the most when he returned home from Vietnam. The day his mother forgot and tried to wake her son like she used to many years ago, Steve shot out of bed at lightning speed and held his mother in a deadly position he had been trained for. Holding his mother in a headlock and pressing into her carotid veins, with a maneuver he had been specially taught to kill enemy, nearly resulted in her death within "60 seconds." Luckily, Steve "snapped out of it," as he recalled. That nearly deadly encounter made him realise he could no longer live at home or in the society he grew up in, so he left for the only place he knew he was not a danger to anyone: the woods. His story is almost the same as the one Springsteen tells in the song "Shut Out The Light" (Springsteen 1984), which was released as a B-side to the song "Born in the U.S.A." and also appears on *Tracks* (Springsteen 1998). "Shut Out The Light" is everything musically that "Born in the U.S.A." is not. It is a slow, haunting song that captures the story of veterans like Steve, who had to go live in the wild, in the only way they knew how. Their experience in Vietnam had changed them forever and took away their ability to live a normal life with their families. In the wild woods of The Olympic Peninsula outside Seattle, Washington, Steve lived like he lived in Vietnam, but without fear of the Vietcong as his enemy.

Then there was Bruce's Special Ops mission, where he was sent to South Vietnam. This was the first time I had ever heard anyone say they were there "just to start the damn war." What?? America sent Special Ops troops to start the war? That is very different and contrary to the mainstream and official view. This could not be true! Did America not go to defend South Vietnam from being taken over by the communists of the North Vietnam? I needed to get to the truth and find out if what this veteran was saying was indeed true. Find out I did, and it was unnerving and shocking, as we shall see later. The documentary also places the Vietnam war in context of previous wars, such as WWII. Returning soldiers from those wars were treated like heroes, with

glittering parades, while the experience of Vietnam veterans was returning to face demonstrations and taunts like “What’s it like to kill babies, GI?” Fred explains that he grew up on films of John Wayne, where you behaved in a certain way in war: you never left your colleagues behind and came home a hero. This was similar to Ron Kovic’s experience, outlined in his powerful and disturbing autobiography (Kovic 2016) and depicted in the film *Born on the Fourth of July*. A hero’s welcome never awaited these soldiers. Instead, they felt used, abused in some cases, left to survive on their own, and that they did mainly in the remote woods and mountains. This was eye opening, pushing me deeper into trying to understand the Vietnam war and any war of the future.

Many years later I read Ron Kovic’s autobiography, where he describes in detail how films of John Wayne and Audie Murphy formed his views on war and its heroes. Kovic describes the influence of Audie Murphy in *To Hell and Back* and how “John Wayne in *The Sands of Iwo Jima* became one of my heroes” (Kovic 2016, p. 69), a testament to how his beliefs were molded. Movies, it seems, were a highly prominent force in shaping the views of many Americans, as both Kovic and Fred revealed. That same power of film was not lost on me either, as I immersed myself in this documentary and others on Vietnam that followed. However, I was not prepared for what was coming my way: a world renowned intellectual and a harrowing documentary.

I accidentally came across Noam Chomsky in 1992, through the BBC Two’s *The Late Show Special*, where he was the sole guest being interviewed by John Pilger. I had no idea who Chomsky was or what to expect, but I knew that if Pilger was doing the interview, it might be worth watching. Chomsky made many remarkable comments, but one in particular jumped out for me, as it seemed so outlandish. He said that “in 1962 John F. Kennedy sent American bombers to attack South Vietnam.” I uttered a loud “Whaat?” It was an astonishing comment that made me jump up and press the record button. Chomsky added that 30 years later, it had yet to be described as an attack on South Vietnam, and instead it was always referenced as the defence of South Vietnam: “The very phrase attack against South Vietnam is inexpressible.” My mind was spinning, but I managed somehow to recall that Vietnam veteran in *Haunted Heroes*, saying he was there to start the “damn war.” What Chomsky was saying was so far removed from the general narrative on Vietnam that I found it hard to accept. Life went on. Then, a few months later, again by pure coincidence, I switched on to Channel 4 in the middle of what looked like a documentary and I recognised Chomsky, so I felt compelled to watch.

Again, he made many captivating remarks. He implied that 'education is a system of imposed ignorance' (Achbar and Wintonick (1992)). That was virtually opposite to what I believed education to be. I believed then, as a young teacher, that education was about removing ignorance, not imposing it. The second statement was about the deliberate 'manufacture of public consent', which is then used by western governments, and specifically the United States of America, to advance the interests of the elite. Such statements seemed to fly in the face of everything I knew about the world's leading democracy, built on the very ideals of freedom, liberty, equality and the pursuit of happiness. Again, my head went for a spin.

Chomsky invited me in through the door of Vietnam and revealed so much more, especially about the American government and its domestic and foreign policy and of course, education. He opened the door and provided some clear answers to many of the questions that Springsteen and his "Born in the U.S.A." made me ask.

7.4. Vietnam: The Camera at War

In 1995, on the 20th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam war, the BBC television aired a range of programmes to mark the event. The most striking documentary was the feature *Vietnam: The Camera at War*, produced and directed by David Upshal (1995). It is a remarkable piece of film making, featuring several iconic photographs and images of a range of incidents to chronicle the Vietnam war from almost the start to finish. It includes rare film footage as well as interviews with the photographers who took some of those iconic photographs of the war. One or two of the photographs I had come across, but many were new to me, along with some very disturbing film footage I had never seen before. It was another quick leap off the couch to the VCR across the room to record this documentary.

Vietnam: The Camera at War was simply startling and not for the faint hearted. Here were photographers talking about the images they had captured immediately before, during and at the war's end. These were photographs, and more; they were what Richmond (2009) calls "a trace of an experience" (p.61) that a photograph captures. There was the expected picture of the marines arriving on the beach and being greeted cheerfully by some young females. Then came the first shock: stunning and gruesome, was the now famous picture of the 'Burning Monk' by Malcolm Browne, who also

described the incident with real film footage, revealing the story and the motive behind the monk's incredible gesture as a form of protest.



Figure 8. The Burning Monk by Malcom Browne.

Photo: Malcolm Browne for the Associated Press. Retrieved from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Th%C3%ADch_Quảng_Đức#/media/File:Th%C3%ADch_Quảng_Đức_self-immolation.jpg

There was not enough outrage I could muster. How could this happen, I asked myself? What drives such sacrifice for protest I wondered? This was only the start. There was more: shock, horror, obscenity and terror of the most utmost kind that I had ever witnessed on film. This was “The horror! The horror” that Joseph Conrad (2003, p. 148) speaks of in his book the *Heart of Darkness*. That is the book on which Francis Ford Coppola based his award winning film *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola 1979), where Captain Kurtz, played by Marlon Brando, utters the same words after vocalizing the paradox of the U.S. Military just before he dies towards the end of the film: “We train young men to drop fire on people, but their commanders won't allow them to write “fuck” on their airplanes because it's obscene” (Milius & Coppola 2001).⁴⁰ That fire was napalm, dropped by the U.S. military airplanes, and its effects were devastatingly caught

⁴⁰ From the original screenplay first published in 2001.

on camera by the photographer Nick Ut. His photograph called *Napalm Girl* (Fig. 9 below), went on to win a Pulitzer prize. Seeing this photograph along with his explanation made it more real than seeing it in some book or newspaper. I had no real idea what napalm was, but I would soon find out all about its development, use and devastating effects. Napalm had to be refined for even more devastating effect, as one American pilot explained while singing its praises:

We sure are pleased with those backroom boys at Dow. The original product wasn't so hot – if the gooks were quick they could scrape it off. So the boys started adding polystyrene – now it sticks like shit to a blanket. But then if the gooks jumped under water it stopped burning, so they started adding Willie Peter [white phosphorous] so's to make it burn better. It'll even burn under water now. And just one drop is enough, it'll keep on burning right down to the bone so they die anyway from phosphorous poisoning.

(Griffiths 2001, p. 210)

Kim Phuc, the little nine-year-old girl in the famous picture was lucky enough to survive as a result of Nick Ut's actions, saving her by taking her to hospital. "Thirty per cent of Phuc's tiny body was scorched raw by third-degree burns" (Mason 2012). She was lucky and continues her friendship with the man who saved her.



Figure 9. Napalm girl

Photo: Nick Ut. Retrieved from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phan_Thi_Kim_Phuc#/media/File:TrangBang.jpg

Worse was yet to come.

First, was the Eddie Adams picture of the cold-blooded execution of a suspected South Vietnamese Vietcong by a South Vietnamese General in the middle of a busy street:



Figure 10. Execution

Photo: Eddie Adams. Retrieved from

<https://cherrieswriter.files.wordpress.com/2015/08/vietnam073-xl.jpg?w=816>

Eddie Adams' commentary to the actual film footage brought the unbelievable repulsion from this war straight into my living room and I knew I was never going to be the same from then on. This was the first time I had seen footage of a human being actually killed by execution in broad daylight. I had never seen a human die of natural causes before, let alone being killed deliberately without a care of any consequences. So much for international law or the Geneva Convention that I had heard a little about during the Falklands conflict, when the Argentinian naval ship was sunk. This happened on the street in Saigon, in broad daylight and in full view of regular folk, including the photographer Eddie Adams.

I had never seen a human life being taken so callously and so quickly. Within a few seconds, he was gone, his body instantly dropping to the tarmac. The terrified 'prisoner' was made to stand with his hands tied behind his back while General Loan walked up casually to him, and before anyone could predict what was going to happen, placed his revolver on the right side of the young man's temple and a split second later,

life was extinguished. Eddie Adams caught it on his camera in all its horrific, pornographic detail, like no other photograph I had ever seen. The supreme fear in the captive's face as the bullet just enters the side of his forehead, brings a shudder to me even as I write this 23 years after first seeing the photograph, its accompanying film footage and Eddie Adams's commentary of the event as it unfolded. How did this fit into rules of engagement in war? What was going on in that war? How does anyone live with themselves after being a witness to that or worse, still being a part of that?⁴¹ To hear Eddie Adams's view of not blaming the General but seeing him as a victim of his circumstances who was left little choice in the matter was incredibly eye-opening. I instantly thought of the legality of the situation and how even prisoners of war had certain rights, but this defied everything. Everything. Nothing said 'welcome to the Vietnam war' more than this. But there was more.

Ron Haeberle was a photographer with the American military and was with part of the 20th Infantry from the 1st Battalion of Charlie Company on March 16, 1968 when they went into the small village in the area known as 'Pinkville.' Haeberle was taking some photographs of the horrific scenes of women and children from the local village being rounded up. As Susan Moeller describes, "he took the photograph, which was the last photograph of these people alive. Turned his back, heard shots being fired, and that was it" (Upshal 1995). 'That was it?' This was hardly a description of what 'it' was. What follows this statement of Moeller's is total silence on screen. Seventeen seconds of silence (that is a long pause) as the camera pans over Haeberle's photograph (see below) of women and children and small babies lying dead, some babies partially and one completely naked, bodies on top of each other, on a remote path between two fields. Unarmed civilians gunned down in cold blood. This was part of the massacre at My Lai. Nowhere has it been captured better than in Haeberle's photograph below.

⁴¹ General Nguyen Ngoc Loan made it to the U.S. (unlike many others) and passed away there in 1998 after running a pizza parlour for several years in Dale City near his home in Burke, Va. (Thomas Jr. 1998)



Figure 11. My Lai

Photo: Ronald L. Haeberle. Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/My_Lai_Massacre#/media/File:My_Lai_massacre.jpg

To this day, those Haeberle photographs turn my stomach and bring life to the phrase 'sick to my stomach.' How can they not? I could not help thinking and still do today: what did those poor villagers do to deserve such fate? What threat did they pose? What did those innocent babies do to the American soldiers to warrant their lives being cut so short? No innocent civilians should be murdered like that and certainly not children, especially not babies.

It was beyond description. I can find no words that accurately capture my feelings. Sure, words like repulsion, horror, disgust, repugnance, loathing and shock all come to mind, but none can convey the actual feeling I sensed during those 17 seconds. How could this have happened? I remember asking myself that question time and time again. I thought there were rules in international armed conflicts about killing innocent children and little babies, and of course, innocent civilians.

Part of the answer here is provided by Turse (2013) in his *Kill Anything That Moves*, which outlines in great detail the real and "deliberate policies, dictated at the

highest levels” (p.6) that resulted in everyday atrocities like My Lai and many others, occurring throughout Vietnam. Sadly, there were not many honorable soldiers like Hugh Thompson to stop the other massacres. Thompson, a U.S. military helicopter pilot, “put his helicopter down between the soldiers and the villagers and ordered his men to shoot their fellow Americans if they attacked the civilians” (BBC 2004). Thompson also radioed other U.S. helicopters, and together they airlifted and rescued at least nine Vietnamese civilians, including a wounded boy at My Lai.

I later discovered that Bilton and Sim (1992) also provide some answers in their meticulous documentation of this slaughter in their book *Four Hours In My Lai*. They highlight what is often missed in the coverage of this horrific event, as they detail how the men of Charlie Company:

entered an undefended village on coast of Central Vietnam and murdered around five hundred old men, women, and children in cold blood. The killing took place, part manically, part methodically, over a period of about four hours. They were accompanied by rape, sodomy, mutilations, and unimaginable random cruelties.

(Bilton & Sim 1992, p. 3)

Varnado Simpson, who was one of the young men that carried out the atrocities at My Lai, confesses in an interview: “That day in My Lai, I was personally responsible for killing about 25 people. Personally. Men, women. From shooting them, to cutting their throats, scalping them, to ... cutting off their hands and cutting out their tongue. I did it.” (Bilton and Sim 1992, p. 7).⁴² This was not a side of the Vietnam war I had seen before.

At the time of watching this documentary I could not help but ask “what exactly was going on here?” One of the photographers featured in this documentary offers his view:

The most classical example of the greatest atrocity in Vietnam, in my opinion, was the murder at My Lai of the villagers and uhm, the person in question who took the photograph was an army sergeant. Now if I had been that soldier, I would have put my camera away and, and got in there and

⁴² Bilton and Sim’s work also features photographs in the middle of their book showing the work of the Charlie Company including them taking a lunch break “only yards from a pile of corpses” (p. 7 of photographs section in the middle of the book between pages 140 and 14). These photographs also include a picture of Varnado Simpson.

saved some of those people. I mean, what are they going to do to you? Are they going to shoot you, one of their own men for saving a child?

(McCullin 1995)

Thankfully, McCullin's view is similar to that of Richmond (2009), who poses a moral dilemma for a "photographer letting someone die while he or she gets a picture of that critical moment for an exhibition" (p. 169).

To this day, this documentary is the most powerful, disturbing, shocking and informative that I have ever seen. It made all the Hollywood movies, as good and as realistic as some were, seem 'PG' rated. I was incensed, numb and speechless. Photographs, like songs, can be seared into your being, and here was no exception. In *Looking at War*, Susan Sontag (2002) says "Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us." They certainly do, and I have been haunted by each of these photographs ever since I first laid eyes on them. I was once again reminded of the words uttered by Marlon Brando's character in a scene set to The Doors' song *The End*, towards the conclusion of the film *Apocalypse Now*, where Kurtz says: "It's impossible for words to describe what is necessary to those who do not know what horror means. Horror. Horror has a face" (Milius & Coppola 2001). This was the face of horror and it was real. All these things actually happened, and people witnessed them firsthand, people were involved in them, people, mainly men, carried out such acts of horror. Once again, the key question of 'why?' preoccupied me, followed closely by "how could they do such a thing? The answer to the latter seems to be, by way of a process known as 'psychic numbing', which is defined by Bai:

Psychic numbing, the inability to feel, especially the suffering and pain of others. Not being able to perceive and feel the humanity in the other, psychically numbed criminals technicize and industrialize killing to the point that killing becomes just a technical problem.

(Mckenzie et al. 2009, p. 135)

Varnado Simpson, in his interview with Bilton and Sim⁴³, describes the process itself:

The hardest – the part that's hard is to kill, but once you kill, that becomes easier, to kill the next person and the next one and the next one. Because

⁴³ Bilton and Sim (1992) also document Simpson's "chronic and severe" PTSD and his three attempted suicides (pp. 5-8).

I had no feelings or no emotions or no nothing. No direction. I just killed. It can happen to anyone.

(1992, p. 7)

All this was beyond my imagination and I was numbed and lost for words. At the same time, it raised more questions and I had no choice but to delve further in, trying to understand the involvement of the U.S. in Vietnam and the causes of the madness that ensued. All this, thanks to the cover song *War* and its accompanying video and that other song that started this whole journey back at the lunch break in June 1984. Damn that song! Now I had to go to Vietnam and see the part of the country where this happened. No longer was I learning like the boy from John Holt's example, I was going further. I had to travel and see this place where such atrocities actually took place. My motivation and interest had literally gone out of this world (or my world) and into another world, to places I had never imagined, and it was all motivated by that Springsteen song. Here was a prime example of how interest was driving real learning. As MacKinnon (2013) says, "It is *in the interest* of learners that we should think again about what motivates learning, how learners become motivated, and what sustains their motivation" (p.16). Both my interest and my learning were about to take another turn. I was going to be educated in the real sense, even though I was considered 'educated' by this time.

7.5. Vietnam: Learning in Real Time

I became so intrigued with the Vietnam war, the veterans' experience, the reason why the U.S. went thousands of miles across the ocean to fight the war, along with government policy that informed it and the media coverage it received, that I decided to go visit Vietnam myself, to witness first-hand the legacy of that war. I was driven by an understanding that "What I need to know was out there in the world" (Fulghum 2003, p. 63). It took me until the summer of 1996, some 12 years after the song "Born in the U.S.A." pinned me back in that armchair in the living room of a house in a quiet street of the small South Yorkshire village, to set foot in Vietnam.

I had no idea what to expect, but I had a need to see the land of this third world country and its people, and to experience their reaction (if any) to Westerners visiting their country. I decided to see what life was like in Saigon, as the city was known before being renamed Ho Chi Minh, and its surrounding areas. I picked Saigon because it had

been featured so much in the coverage of the war (albeit, from the American perspective), in iconic images of people being airlifted by helicopter from the roof of what was “mistakenly” believed to be the U.S. embassy, when in fact it was the “Air France building” (Halstead 1995) at the end of the war, after nearly a decade of death and destruction.

This was going to be my first visit to a communist country. I did have some apprehension, but that was not going to stop me after all this time. From the moment I arrived in Vietnam to the moment I left, my learning took many turns, most of which I did not expect. Firstly, there was the real education from a “place-based pedagogy” (Ellsworth 2005, Gruenwald 2008) that I could not have received from anywhere else but in Vietnam. There were many memorable moments, some of which were absolutely heartbreaking, and others simply illuminating, too many to go into detail. I will focus on two incidents of learning that made me question deeply certain things I had never considered before.

The Question of Democracy

The first main encounter I had that made me question deeply my own taken for granted views was with a young man in his mid-twenties, who approached me on the second night of my trip, as I was walking along a main street. He explained that he was a teacher in a school in Saigon, and asked if I would mind having a conversation with him; that way, he could practice his English. I received a look from this young man, a look like that which Fulghum (2003) speaks of as an “early warning sign of an educational experience” (p.62). He seemed nice enough and non-threatening, but an experienced traveler knows that can often mean nothing and waits for the punchline, where he is sold something, requested to give something or worse, be conned. So, the old advice of ‘be alert and have your wits about you’ was in overdrive, as I had never experienced such a request before on any of my travels. I cautiously engaged in what I thought would be a very brief conversation.

As our conversation progressed, the young man explained that he wanted his English to be good enough to allow him to travel to the West and study for a while, to then return to Vietnam to educate his fellow citizens. Then he said something that made me think and reflect: he wanted to do some good for his country, which he loved, as his country had suffered a lot. Intrigued, I asked him what he meant by ‘doing good for his

country.’ He replied that he wanted to help people see a different way of life. He wanted to travel to the West and return to Vietnam to teach English, and more importantly, to teach how much could be achieved in his country by the next generation. I specifically remember his words to this day: “I would like to see democracy here in Vietnam like you have in England, Western Europe and America. I would like to live in a democracy.”

My real education had begun without me being aware of it, just like I was not aware of *The Stop* (Applebaum 1995) that had just occurred a couple of times in that conversation, and which was to come my way many more times on my trip. Fels (2012) calls a stop a “moment of risk, a moment of opportunity”, key to building self-awareness:

A stop reminds us of our vulnerability; in the presence of others, we are startled to see ourselves anew. A stop is a moment of possible recognition, of reinvention, a reminder of what has been lost, an offering of what possibilities we might consider, if we reconsider our habits of engagement, A stop is an offering that attends our receiving.

(p. 334)

His statement has stayed with me ever since. This was in 1996, a few years after the fall of the Berlin wall and U.S.S.R. recovering from its breakup, under Boris Yeltsin. Given the so called ‘Collapse of Communism’ at the time, this young man’s dream was a distinct possibility. However, a far more important lesson awaited me. That one struck me like an arrow: it was the realization that everything comes at a price.

I clearly remember telling him that living in a democracy is not quite all that it seems. Puzzled, he responded with a curious “what do you mean?” Here, again, was that Stop. This time it was a “time of awareness” (Applebaum 1995, p. 16). I realized that this was the very first time I had myself questioned the notion of democracy, what living in a democracy entails, and what alternative political system may have something better to offer, or not? I see it now as that “moment of arrest in which a person recognizes what he or she has not yet considered” (Fels and Belliveau 2008, p. 36). It was an “aha!” moment, “a moment of recognition” a moment of learning (p. 29). I remember being stunned and speechless, a deer caught in headlights as one could say, a real stop. I had never questioned the notion of democracy before despite the fact that I had lived in one all my life. I realized that I did not really know what democracy really meant beyond the taken for granted notion of everyone having a right to vote. But what did that mean? What did my vote actually achieve? Zinn (2003) asks: “We vote? What does that mean?”

(p. 503). There I was, standing on the soil where so many lives had been lost defending one type of system from the imposition of another. Already, my experience was forcing a shift in my thinking, in the same way that art shifts perception. I was beginning to question myself, the way I had been seeing things, the way I had been viewing the world. On the streets of Saigon, I was being schooled in a different way.

And there was more. The notion of democracy would not leave me. It was a concept that needed clarifying beyond my simplistic understanding, as it is also central to education (Dewey 2009), with our schools failing at it while giving the illusion of upholding democratic principles (Chomsky 2000). I was lucky enough to be alive to see the Berlin Wall come down in Germany and the end of the Apartheid rule in South Africa. Both of those nations were suddenly democratic, but here was a country that had been fighting to keep communism, a fight that had been going on for decades, to the point that it had almost become a way of life. What did all this mean? Democracy is so sought after and the chief reason given by the U.S. to go to war, is either to impose it or defend it. Yet, in the most advanced democratic societies, according to Chomsky (1993) “the general public must be reduced to its traditional apathy and obedience, and driven from the arena of political debate and action, if democracy is to survive” (p.3). How does this get reconciled? Some serious head scratching was in order.

A Way of Life Like No Other

My first three days in Vietnam provided some incredible education for me. Some profound questions were forced to the forefront, as I was starting to see things from an alternative perspective, and it was testing and reshaping my worldview. Nothing did this more than my visit to the Cu Chi tunnels. These are the actual underground tunnels about 70 miles North-East of Saigon that the Vietcong had used during the war. Some sections have been preserved as part of a Vietcong underground tunnel complex for tourists to visit, while others have fallen into decay.

This was the first thing I experienced that provided me with some insight into the war that devastated so much of Vietnam and destroyed so many lives. Three million Vietnamese (Hastings 2018; Lovegel 2012) and well over the official figure of 58,000

American soldiers⁴⁴ perished during that senseless war; add to that the number of American veterans who since committed suicide as a direct result of their experience in Vietnam. The plight of veterans taking their own life very much still continues today with a staggering average of “20 veterans committing suicide a day” in the U.S. (Cabrera 2017). This number does not account for all the devastation and damage done to their immediate and extended family members. Nor does it take into consideration the astronomical number of Vietnamese killed and the destruction to their land. Those tunnels, I hoped, would provide some insight into some aspects of that war.

The journey to the Cu Chi tunnels also allowed me to see some bomb craters, preserved as visual reminders of the air power of the U.S. military. Most of the craters were around 25 to 40 feet in diameter, with the largest one I saw, nearly the size of a football field. Taking in such a sight firsthand leaves an ineffaceable mark on you, as it did on the surface it hit. Seeing the actual devastation caused on the ground made it real. Witnessing such an artifact, if I can call it that, had a very different effect in person than seeing such things in movie clips or newsreel footage of bombs being dropped by B52 bombers, where they looked like huge raindrops. I was lucky to never live in a place that was bombed like that, unlike the people of Vietnam. This was education of a very different kind, in that the place where I stood and what I saw in the distance was doing the teaching. This was place based pedagogy in action like I had never experienced before. Gruenewald (2008) would have been delighted to see such learning taking place.

I tried to imagine what it would have felt like to have been there when those bombs had hit, to hear the B52s flying over and see them dropping that one bomb, the one that made the crater, the sound it must have made as it ripped through the sky, the impact of the actual blast as it hit the ground. I tried to imagine the unimaginable: the people, the animals, the lives shattered in the immediate aftermath of such an explosion. The journalist John Pilger (1994) sadly saw such devastation taking place firsthand. He recalls:

In 1972, I watched American B52s bombing southern Vietnam, near the ashes of a town called An Loc. From a distance of two miles, I could see three ladders of bombs curved in the sky; and, as each rung reached the

⁴⁴ This figure is much higher in reality when you consider the number that are still MIA (missing in action) and all the veterans that have since died of injuries sustained during the war.

ground, there was a plume of fire and a sound that welled and rippled, then quaked the ground beneath me.

(p. 132)

The effects of such bombing are rarely covered in the mainstream media, but Pilger (2002), who later recounted this experience when covering the effects of indiscriminate 'carpet bombing' in the Iraq war of 2003, provides an insight into what it was like when he reached that village of An Loc in South Vietnam:

The street has been replaced by a crater; people a hundred yards from the point of contact left not even their scorched shadows, which the dead at Hiroshima had left. There were pieces of limbs and the intact bodies of children thrown into the air by the blast; their skin had folded back, like parchment. Strange anxieties crowded the mind: I was worried I might step on somebody and disturb the dying. But they were all dead; instead, I slipped on the shank of a water buffalo.

(p. 99)

I wonder now what the Canadian film maker Velcrow Ripper (2004) would have made of these craters had he visited them as part of his five-year touring of sites of extreme tragedies such as Hiroshima, Bhopal, Twin Towers in New York and the 'Killing Fields' of Cambodia for his film '*Sacred Sacred*.' He called these sites across the world 'Ground Zero,' these places where incredible human resilience had emerged despite inconceivable damage. I could not help but feel that old maxim 'there by the grace of god' and feel glad that it had not been me or people I loved. However, there had been many there, human beings, their loved ones, lives that had been instantly decimated. I later learned that "It was estimated that there were 20 million bomb craters in the country" (Zinn 2003, p. 478). I could not imagine 20 million such craters on that land I stood on. I could not imagine that amount of devastation. To this day, I still cannot fully comprehend it. I could not help but think 'why' and 'what for?' What was really gained by this war? Where was the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Freedoms* charter and all its protections?

In Vietnam, such rights were all but ignored. It seemed that the military concept of 'carpet bombing' was taken to a new level, becoming a household term, without most people understanding the true devastation such an act caused. Seeing just two craters left behind by carpet bombing made it very clear to me. If all the bombs that were dropped on this very proud third world country left craters like the ones I saw, the level of

destruction was and is to this day, inconceivable. Who knows exactly what kind of devastation was caused to the people, their land, their homes and the environment generally? Roy (2003) points out:

Never counted in the “costs” of war are the dead birds, the charred animals, the murdered fish, incinerated insects, poisoned water sources, destroyed vegetation. Rarely mentioned is the arrogance of the human race toward other living things with which it shares this planet.

(p. 85)

Add to this the “average of 1,356 living creatures present in each square foot” of the top one inch of forest soil (Dillard 2007, p. 95) and one begins to see the destruction to the environment in its true scale, beyond the appalling human cost. The American military planners it seemed, gave little to no regard to the environment in their bombing. I do not suppose they entertained questions Evernden (1993) poses, with his deep critical examination of ‘humankind and the environment.’ Rather, it appears that the American military acted in Vietnam like a ‘tick’: “Out of the thousands or millions of kind of information that might be had, the tick sees only what is significant to it” (Evernden 1993, p.80). It seemed that everything about the environmental destruction and human cost was ignored for the sake of a military victory, as that was the only thing that was important. However, this was an American victory that never came. Like Evernden and Dillard (in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*), I began to ask myself random questions: Why did this all happen? Why that level of bombing? Why bomb innocent civilians? Why kill innocent women and children? Why was there no regard for the environment? Why bomb for so long and to such extent? Where was God when this was happening and why did s/he not stop it? Of course, these were reactions to seeing such sights with some valid questioning accompanied by some, perhaps less rational, musings. It is hard to stop thoughts that enter your mind involuntarily, especially in situations like this. Place based pedagogy is very powerful, and sitting on the edge of a bomb crater, I sensed it, felt it and experienced it at its best!

Before entering the tunnels, there were diagrams illustrating the intricate underground tunnel network, which revealed the sheer size of the complex. Additionally, there was the example of how the Vietcong or Vietnamese made extraordinary use of discarded materials to great effect. The demonstration of how pieces of automotive car tires were cut into shoe size pieces and threaded with thin rope to make footwear was

astonishing. Compared to the highly equipped boots and combat gear of the American troops, the stark difference between the two sides became abundantly evident. How could an impoverished country compete with such a well-equipped military force as the U. S. Army? This was “organized modern technology versus organized human beings, and the human beings won” (Zinn 2003, p. 469). The Vietnamese had decades, if not centuries, of experience in warfare of a different kind. Unique, resourceful and ingenious, it involved making sandals out of old used car tires and creating underground tunnels, not that you will see such things portrayed in the Hollywood films.

At the tunnel, the first thing that was shocking was the size of the actual tunnel entrance: it looked so small, almost impossible for a human to get through. Of course, for tourists there was a new entrance specially constructed, as we would have struggled to get through the original, ‘real’ entry. The tour guide demonstrated, with a huge smile, one entrance to this tunnel complex by lifting a piece of sod and stepping down into the ground to waist height, as can be seen in the fig. 12 below:



Figure 12. The real entrance
Photo by author. Chu Chi Tunnels, 1995

Had I not seen him do this with my own eyes, I would not have believed it was possible for a human being to enter through such a small opening.

This was followed by the sheer scale of the tunnel complex, all of which was underground, a network so sophisticated, that it was difficult to wrap my head around how it had been possible to build it in the first place. There were meeting rooms, kitchens, sleeping rooms, endless corridors, escape routes and traps for American troops. All this extended underground right up to a few hundred feet from an American military base, where the Vietcong would go to look out of the tunnel hatch to observe activity on the base. The tour guide told us that Vietnamese would go to the American base at night and often shoot at American soldiers from that tunnel lookout, then rush back to the center of the tunnel complex. The Americans never figured out where the shots came from, assuming it was from the woods, as the tunnel entrance was so well camouflaged. All this was new to me and profoundly educative. No matter how skilfully this could be taught in a classroom, or how brilliant the teacher, being in the actual place with all its smells and sounds, feeling the textures of the ground and tunnel walls, made for a very different kind of learning. Being in the place, I was subjected to that “kind of deep seeing, deep listening, that will allow the colours, sounds, shapes, and textures to sink into our beings” (Snowber 2009, p. 68), and because it seeped right into my very being, it has never left me. It was a new kind of learning for me.

The underground complex consisted of a labyrinth of tunnels that had a large kitchen, which also served as a meeting room. It was connected to a narrow, lengthy channel, used to release the cooking smoke from the underground open fire, so that it seeped out into the open ground above, several hundred meters away from the kitchen. This ensured that there would be no suspicion of any activity anywhere in the vicinity of the actual meeting room. It worked for decades. From the kitchen/meeting room, we were escorted along a tunnel corridor that had been re-strengthened and slightly enlarged, to allow the six-foot tall likes of me to be able to get through. This stretch of the tunnel had electric lighting, which had not existed when the tunnels were in active use. During the war, all the physical movement within the tunnels was done mainly in the dark. That, of course, made it very difficult to navigate for anyone not used to the complex, such as the American troops once they found out such tunnels existed. After it became common knowledge that the Vietcong had tunnels to ‘hide in’ and ‘conduct military operations’ from, the US army started to train special units to ‘flush out’ the

'Vietcong' from such places. This did not always work, and only intensified the combat. It was around this time that the tunnels evolved to include traps, which were simple, but thought out very carefully and extremely effective. We were all led along a corridor to see such a trap, and it was horrific. The tour guide explained how the trap was constructed, the thinking behind it, and how it was used.

Upon learning that the US military started to employ their specially trained units of 'Tunnel Rats'⁴⁵ in the tunnels, the Vietcong began to build in 'traps' within the tunnel complexes, explained the tour guide. The traps were virtually always set next to an existing door of a typical corridor. An American soldier, often from the Tunnel Rats team would go along or give chase down a tunnel corridor and come to a stop with two doors. One door would be larger, so that an average human being would be able to bend down and go through; the other door would be considerably smaller, giving the impression that it would be difficult to go through, as you would have to almost bend and crawl through it. The logic employed here by the Vietcong was that the US soldiers were of larger body frame/built than the smaller Vietnamese. When the US soldiers came across two doors as they chased the Vietnamese, they had to make a snap decision under pressure and with adrenalin pumping, no doubt; they almost instinctively went for the larger door. What happened immediately after was gruesome. Once the US soldier went through the trap door, he, as it was always a male, fell down several meters into a pit fitted with sharpened bamboo rods at the bottom that acted like upright spears, as seen in the photograph below. The falling soldier would impale himself on the bamboo rods instantly piercing the body on landing. The sharpened bamboo rods can be seen at the bottom of the pit in fig. 13 below.

⁴⁵ A film called *Tunnel Rats* (also went under the name *'68 tunnel rats'*) was released in 2008 by the director Uwe (2008), depicting some scenes that demonstrate activity and use of tunnels. The film highlights the futility of war and demonstrates the work of the Tunnel Rats and the horror that ensued in the tunnels.



Figure 13. The face of horror at Chu Chi Tunnels 1995.

Photo by author, 1995

It was a horrific sight to see, let alone imagine being trapped in such a way. I could not help but wonder how many American soldiers spent their final moments of life impaled on such bamboo rods, in the complete darkness of these tunnel traps. I quickly began to wonder if any of these fallen soldiers were ever returned to their loved ones, or were they just labeled MIA. Worse still, I wondered how many of them were just left to decompose or removed from such traps to make room for the next victim, their bodies disposed of by other means. Such questions did not get answered.

It was here that the sheer horror and the madness of this war hit me like nothing else. Kurtz was right when he talked of 'horror, the horror;' its face was here to see. This was not a movie or a passage of reading. This was a remnant of a reality that had existed for a long while. The senseless loss of life, the ingenious resourcefulness of the Vietnamese, its simplicity at times against the mighty U.S.A. with all its technological advances and weaponry, was laid bare to visualize. Standing in front of that trap door and seeing the upright sharpened bamboo rods, I could not help but juxtapose the

advanced technological military might with the simplicity of using the naturally grown bamboo, both employed for the same purpose: death.

The whole experience of being in a place with no electricity, no running water, no heat or anything remotely modern was eye opening and overwhelming at the same time. It was hard to imagine the day to day life in these tunnels, let alone the carnage that took place here. What was also disturbing was that part of this tunnel complex had now been restored and preserved as a tourist attraction, complete with laughter, with the workers employed at the tunnels casually explaining each aspect of its workings, from how hard it was to spot an entrance under camouflage, to how bodies were impaled onto bamboo spikes. For these workers, it was all in a day's work. However, for me, it was way more than I had bargained for. Being in this actual place, in these tunnels with all their tragic history just reinforced the importance of pedagogy of place and the place as a critical site of learning. Not only did I "feel the wounds of history" (Dunlop 2009, p.20) by travelling to this place, but also felt this was a 'place of learning' (Ellsworth 2005), where my knowledge was "in the making" (p.1), as opposed to being taught.

Overall, I was fascinated to see the various aspects of the tunnel complex and pleased that it had been preserved. To get to see a whole meeting room that had served as an underground kitchen and dining room, with the intricate labyrinth of interconnecting tunnels and their traps, and the emergency escape route to the riverbank, was simply amazing. How such tunnels had been constructed, the simple tools used, where the dugout materials went and how all the camouflage was created, how they were maintained, was still a mystery to me. I could not have imagined such ingenuity. The inventiveness of the Vietnamese is rarely, if ever, presented in the West, which has mainly shown the Vietnamese in a negative light as the enemy, or worse yet, as "stick figures" in Hollywood movies (Pilger 1994, p.135).

The whole experience at Cu Chi turned me inside out. I marvelled at the brilliance of Vietnamese propaganda and their warfare that had been refined over half a century. These tunnels were remarkable in how they preserved a way of life. Sections of Vietnamese society literally lived in such tunnels, from where not only they conducted warfare, but also lived in what became a normal lifestyle. In these tunnels, they slept, had meetings, had parties, celebrations, marriages, births, deaths, and they even had mini hospitals in the way of surgical units. I could not have imagined such ingenuity,

resourcefulness and cunning. These tunnels were created in the Vietnamese fight with the French and then expanded in the war against the U.S. The simple yet extremely effective use of guerilla warfare, with weaponry made from raw materials such as bamboo, had devastating results.

The U.S., on the other hand, relied on modern warfare technology. The intense bombing of civilians, a tactic that was developed by the British in the “carpet bombing of Dresden, Hamburg, Frankfurt and other cities” (Zinn 2002, p. 80) became the norm, as did the increasing use of chemical and biological weapons such as Agent Orange and napalm. The devastation from Agent Orange continues to wreak havoc four decades later, as Newton (2016) revealed with shocking photographs of children who are suffering horrific effects of Agent Orange in Vietnam. According to Newton, American forces sprayed nearly 20 million gallons of the chemical in Vietnam, Laos and parts of Cambodia, in an effort to deprive guerrilla fighters of cover by destroying plants and trees where they were seeking refuge. It is hard to believe that “The Kennedy administration pioneered the massive use of chemical weapons against civilians as it launched its attack against South Vietnam” (Chomsky 1999, p.41). The United States pilots, in their bombing of South Vietnam, “began to use chemical warfare for crop destruction and started driving millions of people into concentration camps” (Chomsky 2003, p. 20). The journalist Amnon Kapeliouk visited Vietnam in 1988 and reported that “Thousands of Vietnamese still die from the effects American chemical warfare,” and cited estimates of one-quarter of a million victims in South Vietnam. Kapeliouk also described hospital scenes that were “terrifying”, where children were dying of cancer and birth defects (Chomsky 1999, p.40-41). Given the large area covered by the American chemical warfare, this is not surprising. According to Zinn (2003), bombing was only one form of attack:

poisonous sprays were dropped by planes to destroy trees and any kind of growth – an area the size of the state of Massachusetts was covered with such poison. Vietnamese mothers reported birth defects in their children.

(p. 478)

In America, the V.A. has at last admitted that there are birth defects in children born to Veterans who served in Vietnam, although they seem to focus just on spina bifida. Newton (2016) cites several diseases and illnesses that directly relate to Agent Orange, including non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, several varieties of cancer, type 2 diabetes,

soft tissue sarcoma, birth defects in children, spina bifida and reproductive abnormalities. In Vietnam, babies are also born with such birth defects and continue to suffer as Newton and Kapeliouk reveal. Also, as a result of those chemicals, there were examples of those not lucky enough to be born, fetuses that never got the chance to become babies, and instead became exhibits in a museum, housed like relics in large jars. It felt like if some of the unborn babies could just be released from their glass prisons and be freed, they would come to life, as some had their eyes wide open, almost asking for such freedom. It was hard to look at life that could have been, but instead had been destroyed. They had no names, as such privilege as identity was never bestowed on them, but they did have their mothers' names and cause of death listed, for the world to read. I felt like opening the bottle jars and freeing them all, knowing it would make no difference. They were there to serve as a reminder of innocent lives lost in tragic war.

Such 'artefacts' of war, along with more technical information, were on display in the Museum of the Vietnam War in Ho Chi Min City, presenting the story of that war from the Vietnamese stance, a perspective very different from the American official view and very enlightening, to say the least. Most Vietnamese did not see it as a 'Vietnam War' but saw it as defending their nation against 'invaders and colonizers', just like they had done against the French and the Chinese centuries before (Hastings 2018, p. 2). This view was something I was new to, as was the Vietnamese propaganda. Sometimes it was hard to imagine the truth, but one thing was for sure: the horror that was inflicted on all that lived and served in the Vietnam war was not for the faint hearted. If it were not for the song "Born in the U.S.A.," I probably would have never gone to Vietnam and witness the horror of that war, albeit retrospectively.

My Western mindset precluded me from being truly able to walk in the shoes of all those Vietnamese who adopted a way of life in such tunnels as those at Cu Chi and how they fought that war. To my surprise, my same Western mind also precluded me from truly walking in the shoes of all those Americans who were sent to Vietnam to do the fighting, or of those who sent them there. I wish I had been blessed with the skills of Springsteen to be able to walk in others' shoes. Springsteen's ability to connect with his audience on a deeper level comes down to this particular skill. He has demonstrated his ability to walk in "somebody else's shoes" (Springsteen 2009) on many songs and spoke about it on many occasions. You see it firsthand in "Born in the U.S.A.," where you can almost believe Springsteen is the veteran in the way he sings, but also how he captures

the story of so many Vietnam veterans. It is part of his gift and developed skill as an artist to recognize and feel empathy for another person's predicament or lifestyle, understand these things himself and then reveal them to others, who may not otherwise be aware of such issues. That is what art does so well, showing what is not often seen, offering an alternative perspective.

7.6. Vietnam: A Lesson Like No Other

Volumes upon volumes have been written and continue to be written about the Vietnam War. There is a whole body of work that has dealt with Vietnam from virtually every perspective, ranging from films, documentaries, media coverage, academic scholarship, and government papers. There are books about the soldiers' experience (Edelman 1985, Kovic 2016) of that war, as well as the music that played such an important role in their everyday life in Vietnam (Bradly & Werner 2015). Why has so much been written about Vietnam? Why does it continue to be written? More important to me were questions like: What was the Vietnam war all about? Why was there so much devastation and destruction? Why did the U.S. drop so many bombs, so many chemicals? Why did it last so long? How did it end and why did it end the way it did? What was gained by the U.S. in fighting this war? Why did the American government lie to its people and the world? The road to such questions started with that unexpected and somewhat unusual song, "Born in the U.S.A."

Unknown to me at the time, such questions have been and continue to be asked by others, such as Harvard University professor Fredrik Logevall (2013), in his book *Embers of War* and TED Talk (2015). There is also the ten-part documentary series *The Vietnam War* by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick (2017), which was more than ten years in the making and features testimony from nearly a hundred witnesses, civilians and combatants, as it tries to tell the story from both sides. There is also an accompanying work by Ward and Burns (2017). Then, there is the recent detailed account of the war by British journalist Hastings (2018). Plus, there are pieces dealing with specific events, like that of *Hue 1968*, which Mark Bowden (2017) called the "turning point" of the war. Christian Appy (2015) maintains:

The Vietnam War still matters because the crucial questions it raised remain with us today: Should we continue to seek global military superiority? Can we use our power justly? Can we successfully intervene

in distant lands to crush insurgencies (or support them), establish order, and promote democracy?”

(p. x-xi).

Appy also goes on to ask Americans questions like “what degree of sacrifice will the public bear?” and can American citizens, through their elected officials, change the American foreign policy or “will it be permanently be controlled by an imperial presidency and an unaccountable military-industrial complex?” (p. xi). These questions certainly seem very relevant to today’s and for future generations, those same young people Springsteen spoke to when he said, “Next time, they’re going to be looking at you.”

Logevall, who has spent over two decades studying the Vietnam War asks “How and why did it happen? Why did it last as long as it lasted? How did it end and why did it end?” He goes on to say, “These are questions of profound historical importance” and argues that “This war was unnecessary” (Logevall 2015). Ken Burns (2017) adds “Vietnam is unfinished history for most Americans. There’s a lot of new scholarship, new perspectives.” Burns maintains that Americans are still figuring out how to deal with Vietnam and where to place it, because Vietnam was the first war America lost and “to understand that “loss will be an ongoing conversation, (...) for an awfully long time” (Burns 2018).

All this was new to me. All the Hollywood films I had seen about Vietnam did not tell me about the 58,220 Americans “whose names are etched in the National Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C” (Logevall 2015), or that in addition to this, an estimated “700,000 veterans suffered psychological after-effects” (BBC 2013). Also, and more importantly in scale, “up to 3 million Vietnamese died and 2 million of those were civilians” (Logevall 2015). Just let that sink in for a minute: three million people, of which two million were civilians caught up innocently in a war not of their choosing. These figures are astounding when they are humanized. Surely, no sane person(s) could willingly be a part of such tragedy, but they were and some did so deliberately. Otherwise, how could you have a situation where:

By the end of the Vietnam war, 7 million tons of bombs had been dropped on Vietnam, more than twice the total bombs dropped on Europe and Asia in World War II – almost one 500-pound bomb for every human being in Vietnam.

(Zinn 2003, p. 478)

The figure you read in that statement is 7 million. It already looks like a large number, and then you add the 'tons,' and it becomes enormous and unimaginable. How many bombs does it take to win a war against a small third world country, I wonder? The fact that almost 'one 500-pound bomb for every human' being was dropped deliberately on innocent people just does not make sense, no matter how you look at it! After all this, consider how was it possible that:

From 1964 to 1972, the wealthiest and most powerful nation in the history of the world made a maximum military effort, with everything short of atomic bombs, to defeat a nationalist revolutionary movement in a tiny peasant country – and failed.

(Zinn 2003, p. 469)

Maybe now it is beginning to make sense why millions or possibly billions of words have been written about the Vietnam war. I had no clue if it were not for Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A." taking me down all sorts of roads I had not envisioned. I certainly did not see them as roads to the most effective learning that continues to this day.

Learning that the United States routinely engage in war offers a greater understanding of Springsteen's statement to his young audience in Los Angeles in 1985 of "next time they're going to be looking at you," before launching into his cover of Edwin Star's "War." I had no idea that "No other nation on the planet makes war so often, as long, as forcefully, as expensively, as destructively, as wastefully, as senselessly, or as unsuccessfully as the United States. No other nation makes war its business" (Jones 2013, p. 4). This supports Waters' view of "war being hugely profitable" and the fact that it will happen again, as the historian Howard Zinn noted: "it seems that in the history of the United States since the end of the World War II, a war is almost always either on or pending" (Zinn 2006, p. 15).

It was unnerving to learn that the U.S. has been at war for decades. Vidal (2002) summarizes: "in these several hundred wars against Communism, terrorism, drugs, or sometimes nothing much, between Pearl Harbor and Tuesday, September 11, 2001, we tended to strike the first blow" (p.40). William Blum (2002) adds: "From 1945 to the end of the [last] century, the United States attempted to overthrow more than 40 foreign governments, and to crush more than 30 populist-nationalist movements struggling against intolerable regimes" (p.2). He then charges the U.S. for causing "the end of life

for several millions people, and condemned many millions more to a life of agony and despair” (p.2). Blum also offers a sobering cost analysis of the U.S. military budget in 2002, citing that “One year’s military budget of \$330 billion is equal to more than \$18,000 an hour for every hour since Jesus Christ was born (p. xxiv). Osama bin Laden urged every American to read Blum’s 2002 book *Rogue State*, to see what the U. S. government was really up to in the world (Langer, 2018). Chomsky and Herman (1979) offer a devastating in depth look at how the U.S. has supported and exported terror and torture across the rest of the world and the costs involved in terms of dollars and personnel.

Particularly striking is the diagram on the ‘Frontispiece’ of ‘Sun and its Planets: Countries Using Torture on an Administrative Basis in the 1970’s, With Their Parent Client Affiliations’ (p. i). It was eye opening, shocking and unnerving to see that the United States actually sponsored terror and the U.S. tax payers paid for it (and continues to pay for it to this day), without the knowledge of most of its citizenry, or as Said (1999) calls them, ‘brain-washed citizens’ (p. 11). On top of that, it is that same citizenry that pays for the huge cost of such military involvements, often without realising it. As Waters (2017) puts it to the American people, “it’s your resources” that are being used for military purposes because “war is hugely profitable.” John Fogerty (2005) makes it clear that war is all “about money.” Hartung (2012) details the role that Lockheed Martin plays in the U.S military -industrial complex and the staggering amount of money involved. Chatterjee (2009) provides a similar overview of the role the U.S. giant Halliburton plays in the U.S. military, with equally staggering sums of money being exchanged.

I later discovered that there is another reason for the U.S to be constantly engaged in war of some kind, and that is for further development and advancement of military warfare. It appears that there were significant lessons learned from the Vietnam war, and some of them showed up 20 to 30 years later in the gulf war of 1991 and the Iraq war of 2003. These include the U.S. military controlling the reporting of the war. There would be no more journalists allowed in the ‘theatre of war’ (a most macabre description if there ever was one), but they would be ‘embedded,’ or as Zinn put it “go to bed with the American army” (Zinn 2006, p.95) and you will be awarded certain privileges. There would be no media coverage of the returning bodies of fallen U.S. soldiers, as was the case in the Vietnam war. Body bags were renamed as ‘Human remains pouches.’ There was also the technological advancement of weaponry that

included laser guided 'smart bombs,' some tipped with uranium that 'cut through Iraqi tanks like butter,' incinerating those inside (Deghett 2014),⁴⁶ as well as contaminating the environment for decades (Blum 2002; Fisk 2005). All this, in a war that Chomsky (2015) described as "the worst crime of this century."

There were also lessons not learned, as Bowden (2017) points out in *Hue 1968*. Marlantes (2017) calls these "lessons that we seemingly forgot when conducting our wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Lessons we need to go over now so that we may never forget them again" (p. C6). Marlantes, who was a U.S. marine and served in Vietnam himself, heaps high praise in his review of Bowden's work but also offers his own view of American involvement in wars since Vietnam and the wars yet to come. Such comparisons and questions of lessons learnt and not learnt are also made by all the contributors in Gardner and Young's (2007) *Iraq and the Lessons of Vietnam: Or How Not to Learn From the Past*.

It is a very hard fact to digest that the United States will be going to war again. This is guaranteed if history is any guide, and some notice is taken of the searing critique offered by Chomsky and Herman (1979, 1988), Chomsky and Vltchek (2013), Chomsky in many of his works (1987, 1993, 2002, 2007) and others, such as Blum (2002). All this was and is still happening in the world's greatest democracy, where human life was supposed to be cherished, a country that is the home of the United Nations and their *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* charter, supposed to protect each and every human being on the planet. Surely, something was and is seriously wrong with this picture. I wonder if this is what led Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in his famous Riverside church speech, to denounce "the U. S. government for its war in Vietnam" and call the United States "the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today" (Zinn 2006, p. 18). This is certainly not the picture I had of the "greatest country in the world" (Lemon 2019), and I wonder if this is also the case for most people around the world, U.S. citizens included.

⁴⁶ Kenneth Jarecke's photograph of an incinerated and charred Iraqi soldier appeared in *The Atlantic*, on August 8, 2014, in the article *The War Photo No One Would Publish* by Torie Rose Deghett. It can be seen here under paragraph 6: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-war-photo-no-one-would-publish/375762/>

To this day, I am fascinated with that war and all wars that have followed since, because they reveal so much more about our world, our elected (and unelected) leaders, our foreign policy and domestic policy. All this learning started with that first listening to “Born in the U.S.A.,” where my ‘other education’ took root; in Vietnam, it began to flourish, as did my intrigue with war, peace, foreign policy, especially U.S. Foreign policy, governments, education, along with a fierce desire to get an accurate picture of the world we live in. This was something my schooling did not do, but my ‘other’ education has been doing since 1985.

Chapter 8. Revelations

Cornfields

In the wilderness miles from home
I stand here feeling so small
I'm reminded of a time when I was 5 years old
standing in the cornfields, the stems so tall
I was only a child but at one with my true home
that was before I started my journey with the modern world
before I was taught wrong from right
before things were made into black and white
ignoring the grey site
life has so many funny turns
some you see coming, others send you in a spin
lost are many years searching for a new home?
separating the known from the unknown
miles get travelled, nations get crossed
most of the world seems all but lost

However, here in the woods it all feels right
a stillness and calm, day or night
fresh raindrops feel so cool on my face
cleansing the troubles of that other place
there is a madness to the everyday city life
something we don't quite understand or get right
but what is it that drives some to the wild
getting way from the so-called lifestyle
searching for inner peace it seems
comes at a price not so easily seen
maybe the cornfields knew so long ago
it's only my learning that's been really slow.

(Thindal 2019)

As I reach the end of the journey of this dissertation, I feel it is appropriate for me to return to the cornfields I sat in all those years ago. With this poem I sum up my educational journey by using the safe and reflective space that cornfields once offered. This poem has significance for me as I collect my thoughts of what this dissertation means to me and what it has revealed. As I reflect on my past through re/searching of the self, I am reminded by Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo (2009) that “we remember where we have been, attend to where we are, imagine where we might go” (p. 97). This dissertation, through lifewriting and examining lived experience of my autobiographical fragments has allowed me to ask and find answers to questions I never sought in my schooling or my professional life. This work has also allowed me to see the possibilities that lie ahead in the personal, the professional and universal. As I said at the beginning, this work is a call to be deeply human, to becoming and developing empathy. This has all been possible through story (or in my case a song with its story), and its importance as a vehicle for growth, as each story connects and reconnects with the other and another.

Not three minutes, but four minutes and forty seconds is all it took to lead me down the path to my real education. It was the kind of education that made me think way beyond the obvious, think deeply, listen deeply, see deeply and question deeply, like I never did throughout my formal schooling. It was through the lens of Vietnam that I first questioned what democracy was and what living in it was like, and was able to compare it with communism, for example. It was through the lens of Vietnam that I began to see how U.S. foreign policy was implemented and its effects on other nations. It was through the guidance of Springsteen’s most powerful song that I began to question beyond the generally accepted and “taken for granted” (Robinson 2009) concepts or issues like education, teaching, learning, democracy, nationalism, patriotism, and even on a personal level, love. All these concepts are needed to better understand the world I live in as it really is (as opposed to how I thought it was). All this and more came through a popular song. But then again, “Born in the U.S.A.” was no ordinary rock song.

This is a song that has been studied, dissected and used by everyone from academics (Schneider 2014; Cowie & Boehm 2006; Himes 2005; Mackey-Kallis & McDermott 1992; Lauglo 2003; Cullen 1998, 2008, 2009; Gromis 2013; Stur 2012; Phull 2008; Johnston 2007; Appy 2015; James 1989; Shuker 2013), to lawyers (Smith 2005, Geyh 2005), to poets (Winn 2009), to journalists and critics (Hepworth 1984, 1986;

Meldrum 1995, 1984, Loder 1984, Phillips 1984), and many others. It is also a song that was and still continues to be misunderstood (Springsteen 1986, 2001, 2016). Perone (2016) goes as far as stating “Bruce Springsteen’s ‘Born in the U.S.A.’ is one of the most misinterpreted songs of the recording era” (p. xvii). It is a song that reached the highest office in the United States and was used illegally by a President as a rallying cry in an election campaign. It is also a song for which Springsteen turned down \$12 million from Chrysler Motor company, refusing to have it used in their “TV commercials” (Appy 2015, p.259) in the mid-eighties.⁴⁷ It is a song that gave Springsteen and his fellow musicians their most exhilarating experience of recording a song in a studio (Marsh 1996). It is a song that gets regularly played at various celebrations on July 4th in the U.S. every year. It is also the song that in 1985 made Springsteen “rock’s biggest star” (Geldof 1988, p. 332). It is also considered by Perone (2016) as one of the 100 songs that defined America.

However, for me, the most important gift “Born in the U.S.A.” provided was that it ensured what I learnt from Springsteen served as a template and a guide to a form of enlightenment. It revealed to me all that could not have been revealed by other means before. It allowed me to become informed and then transformed in a way that school did not. But how did he do what my schooling could not? The answer is: with his brilliance as a teacher. Firstly, Springsteen maintains that his “work is a map, for whatever it’s worth” (1998, p. 253). Bai (2014) describes this method when she states, “Never compel anyone to learn. Invite, suggest, and propose, but never demand that they learn; never ‘make’ them learn” (p.34). Is that not what a great teacher does, gives students guidance and lets them find their own way? Chomsky (2004) seems to agree, adding the critical notion of truth to the process:

A good teacher knows that the best way to help students learn is to allow them to find the truth by themselves. Students don’t learn by mere transfer of knowledge, consumed through rote memorization and later regurgitated. True learning comes about through the discovery of truth, and not through the imposition of an official truth.

(p. 21)

⁴⁷ Twelve million dollars was considered a huge sum of money at the time, given that The Rolling Stones were paid \$3 million by Microsoft in 1995 to use their song “Start Me Up” according to Bob Herbold, Microsoft’s retired chief operating officer. (<https://www.aaaa.org/timeline-event/start-3-million-anthem-launched-microsofts-windows-95/>).

Springsteen exudes that rare gift of presence, that “ability to be consciously present in-the-moment; to be able to see, feel, know, and notice present experience, which enhances the potential for a strong, felt connection between educator and learners” (Cohen 2010, p.5). I have not come across anybody that demonstrates this better on stage, in recorded songs, interviews and in person. It is this presence that gives Springsteen the greatest connection most teachers lack. Let me demonstrate this further by the words of Robert Coles,⁴⁸ who states: “Bruce not only teaches us when he shows us what he’s seen, but more importantly by showing us how much there is to see and where we might look, he teaches us to see more ourselves” (2005, p. 960). That is exactly what Springsteen did for me. He made me look inside myself and then, renewed, I looked at the world with new questions that sought greater understanding of how we should live with each other versus how we actually do.

Further evidence of Springsteen’s pedagogical skills was brought to light by Professor Randy Lee when interviewing Coles. He pointed out that Walker Percy, the classic figure who people study at Harvard, was “directing attention to Bruce Springsteen as a legitimate artistic force and a legitimate brilliant mind to be studied.” To this, Coles replied “Bruce is a teacher who tells and educates people like Walker [Percy] and me and others, about the world we live in” (Lee 2005, p.956). I could ‘rest my case’ here, but there are two more points to highlight. First is Springsteen’s own take on what he tries to accomplish in his show:

Presenting ideas, asking questions, trying to bring people closer to characters in the songs, closer to themselves – so that they take those ideas, those questions, - fundamental moral questions about the way we live and the way we behave toward one another.

(1998, p. 257)

The second point is about how each of us need to look into the parts of ourselves that most either shy away from or are unaware of, or simply refuse, to allow deeper learning. Here, Springsteen offers this advice:

You find your identity in your wounds, in your scars, in the places where you've been beat up and you turn them into a medal. We all wear the things

⁴⁸ Robert Coles is a Harvard Professor, winner of The Pulitzer prize and recipient of the Medal of Freedom from President Clinton.

we've survived with some honour, but the real honour is in also transcending them.

(Springsteen 2009)

Only a teacher with some wisdom or the ease of a brilliant pedagogue offers insight like this, and in my experience in education. I have not come across many. I struggle to use all the fingers on one hand to recount the number of teachers that have come close to offering such teaching. Springsteen goes further in explaining the road we all have to go on if we want to find our true self and understand all that makes us who we are, which involves excavating truths, which are often painful, from early childhood. He says, "Your life narrative, the inner geography that you are going to have to make your way through is quite firmly set pretty early on" (2009, p.363). That is what I tried to do in this work. The result has been that I am no longer the teacher I was. Nor am I the administrator I used to be. I have to revisit the purpose of such job roles. In light of some questions that have arisen from this work, I have some reconsidering to do. Questions like what kind of world are we living in? What kind of world do we want to leave for our students? How do educators make their students see the world as it really is and what goes on in it? More importantly, what kind role should educators play? I am reminded here by three eminent educators who flashed warning signs that I was not aware, of and too many educators ignore. Do educators want to serve as 'handmaidens of the state' as Madeline Grummet (1998) warned, or do they want to be 'technocrats' and 'functionaries', as Maxine Green (1995) asks? Or, do they want to be the 'commissars' that Chomsky (2002) contends most educators end up being. These are real and critical questions that every teacher needs to ask themselves. These are questions that as a teacher and as an educator in various positions I never got to ask myself in 25 years of professional practice. However, the answer to all three is now clear, for me at least, and it is a definite and a defiant "no." What we need is for teachers to become "active and insightful practitioners" (Fels 2008).

Then, there is the question of what kind of education do we want to provide our students? Is it the formal kind that I and so many received, or is it the 'other' kind, which Brooks alerted me to and which I have detailed in this work? How do teachers get beyond the constraints, demands and requirements of their roles and allow themselves to be truly present in their classes, present in the moment, present in each moment? How do we become present like Springsteen is on stage, in every song; present like Palmer, Cohen, van Manen, Snowber, Aoki, Fels, Pinar, Bai, Ellsworth advocate?

How can the majority of educators, rather than the already converted minority, merge 'entertainment and teaching', as Postman (1995) suggested, and develop a pedagogy of song that can open doors to real learning rather than "stuff our students with a billion bits of information and skills" (Bai, 2005, p.45), and test them later essentially for recall most of the time? Can educators enable students to see how their education can also be a system of imposed ignorance? How can hard working teachers and other professional educators NOT undertake a career in education, like I did, before asking the questions "what is education?" "what does it mean to be educated" and "what does it mean to be a teacher?"

The song "Born in the U.S.A." schooled me in a completely different manner. It challenged me to question myself, the way I had been seeing things, the way I had been viewing the world. One song, in its four minutes and forty seconds, informed and then transformed me, well before I realised that was an expected outcome, as "transforming is what art does" (Sontag 2002, p.44). It is an understatement to admit that, despite being a professional educator, I had 'walked around with my eyes closed' for a good part of my career. Thankfully, that song took me in directions I had not envisioned, and it replaced learning through school with a different, much richer form. It opened my eyes to a new world, a world that, as Applebaum (1995) contended, is not easily perceived or understood: "The world is not the way it appears, nor is the eye so magnificently insightful" (p. 56).

We live in a world where political leaders elected to the highest offices lie to the public they serve. We only need to look at the current U.S. Administration, as The Time Editorial Board. (2017; 2017a) and Daniel Dale (2019) reveals, with his daily tracking of the lies being told by the President of the United States. American presidents telling lies is nothing new. Ellesberg (1974) demonstrated that every president from Truman to Nixon told lies to the American people and the world about Vietnam. Such lies continued after Nixon to the present incumbent. Chomsky (1992, 2003) argues that some of these lies are covering serious 'war crimes,' and "If the Nuremberg laws were applied, then every post war American president would have been hanged." Rebecca Gordon (2016) makes the case for indicting President Bush and President Obama, and key members of their administrations, including Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, Vice-President Cheney, all for war crimes.

We live in a world where the U.S. builds military bases in other countries. Some of these are as big as Sacramento, California (Sheehan 2005), as is the case in Baghdad, Iraq. That U.S. military base in Baghdad also houses the U.S. embassy in Iraq, which is “nothing like any embassy that has ever existed before in history”. The base is a “city within the Green Zone protected by U.S. forces [...] that has everything from missiles to MacDonal’d’s. Anything you want” (Chomsky 2007). All of this paid by the American public, and mostly without their knowledge.

We live in a world where going to war is made so easy (Solomon 2005, Alper and Earp 2008), never ending (Bacevich 2013; Vidal 2002), extremely profitable (Hartung 2012, Chatterjee 2009, Klein 2005, Waters 2017, Foggerty 2015), part of the overall economy and the economy of peace (Keynes 2007). The economy that schools prepare children for is the same economy where highly educated and highly qualified plan, prepare and execute war often against the poorest nations in the world, resulting in death and destruction. A current example is Yemen, where 91,000 people have been killed since the Saudi Arabian led so called ‘coalition,’ supported by the U.S., was launched in 2015 (Carey 2019; Salama 2014;). 91,000 is just a figure on a page until we stop and think of the human carnage and suffering forced on real living people who were mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, children. I very much doubt that most of those 91,000 human beings were ever involved in any form of terrorist activity. It is impossible to conceive that many people becoming so called ‘terrorists.’ What we see here is a military strategy of inflicting as much damage on the civilians, a strategy pioneered by the British in the “carpet bombing” of Dresden, that has been since developed and perfected by other countries, mainly the U.S., and in the case of Yemen, Saudi Arabia.

We live in a world of terror and terrorists, but what does that mean? We have had a “War on Terror” for decades now, ever since Ronald Regan coined the phrase, to be later revived by George W. Bush after the 9/11 atrocities. Those heinous terrorist acts of 9/11 should have been dealt with like the terrorist act of Timothy McVeigh, who committed the worst act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history (Life 2003, p.87). Blum (2002) poses a critical question: if McVeigh “had not been quickly caught, would the United States have bombed the state of Michigan or any of the other places he called home?” (p.xii-xiii). McVeigh was tried in a U.S. court of law, found guilty and sentenced accordingly. It is a simple analysis that should have also applied to the terrorists who attacked the World Trade Centre, argue Ratner and Ray (2004) whilst asking whether

Timothy McVeigh should be called “an enemy combatant?” (p.71). In a more sane and truly civilized world, the U.S. response to 9/11 should not have been the invasion of Afghanistan or Iraq, which resulted in over 500,000 deaths, many of whom were innocent women and children who suffered unnecessary, violent deaths. How does this reconcile with the fact that we live in a world where “the biggest international terror operations that are known are the ones that are run out of Washington”? (Chomsky 1992). To make matters even more complicated, the United States is a recognized ‘Haven for Terrorists’ (Blum 2002, pp. 79-86). In fact, “there are a few, if any nations that harbor more terrorists than the United States” (p. xv).

The song “Born in the U.S.A.” came to me, seized me, and led me to explore such complex issues. In the process, I found answers to some questions, while raising many more, through a journey that has literally taken me from one side of the world to another. This song engaged me in the learning process like no school, college or university teachers had done before. Prior to the release of that song, my education was endured as opposed to enjoyed. My education was that “business of sitting at a desk among thirty or so others, being talked at, most boringly and doing exercises, tests, and worksheets, mostly boring, for years and years and years” (Egan 1997, p. 9).

How do teachers move past the tired conversations of “Standards, assessment, outcomes, and achievement” (Greene 1995) that has structured their practice for decades? Even though education has moved forward, it has become “more about packaging, more about FTEs, more about supplying the economy with labour force to build the American industrial complex” (Pelias 2004, p. 147). How do educators move from curriculum-as-plan to curriculum-as-lived-experience (Aoki 2005, p. 160), where students’ own world and experience is central to their learning? How do we all move from our heads and thinking to sensing with our bodies? Aoki argues that the very process of ‘thinking’ in the “Western tradition has a seductively intellectual ring to it” (Aoki 2005, p. 196). It is somewhat ironic that we are seduced by what is in our heads, not the knowing that exists within our bodies, built from the rich experiences of our senses. How do we get past what Chomsky (2005) aptly observed to be so prevalent in academia, the fact that “a large amount of scholarship is clerical work? [...] a good deal of science is detailed routine work” (p.139), and focus on what is important and meaningful to students? How do we turn the “concept of curriculum on its head, such that the central driving force would be the interests of learners rather than those of

ministries of education and political influences” (MacKinnon 2015, p.16)? Teachers need to address all such questions and find their own solutions to become effective, present educators.

We live in a world that is full of absolute beauty, full of the sensual, yet we have to be reminded to “wake up and smell the roses” (Waters 2017). Seeing, feeling, touching, smelling, hearing, all deeply, are gifts that most of us have been schooled out of, yet they are essential to our connection to our world. How do educators enable that reconnection to the earth that Abram, Snowber, Bai and so many others advocate for so ardently? How do we engage professionals beyond thinking about it and actually finding time to practice it, to integrate it in their lives and classrooms? I did not have time for it in my career because I was “busy doing” education rather than seeing, hearing, sensing. Schooling had yet to equip me with the ability to “become fully present to the sensuous reality” before me, where I would “feel extraordinarily awake and alive” (Bai 2009, p. 143). And then, one day, out of the blue came a song, “Born in the U.S.A.”, and it did that for me, and so much more.

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Appendix A.

John Holt's example demonstrating how effective learning can be achieved when one is allowed to follow one's passion without any formal instruction or teaching is cited here in full:

One day he saw, and read, I think in the National Geographic, an article about underwater swimming. Like most kids, he was very interested in scuba equipment, and even more in the varied and colorful fish the divers were seeing and catching, in the whole idea of an underwater world with a life of its own. Excited, he talked to his mother about the article. Soon after, she found him another article about divers. This time, however, they were not diving for fish, but for treasure- vases, bowls, implements, and weapons, lying deep in the hold of a ship that three thousand years before had sunk in the Mediterranean. Everything about this story fascinated the boy, above all the idea that these strange and beautiful objects had been lying there, unknown, forgotten, for so long. He became interested in the pre-Homeric civilizations of Crete and Mycenae that had made these treasures. Helpful adults found him some books about them, which he read. In them mention was made of Homer, and the Trojan War, so he read some abridged versions of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Somewhere in his reading about Troy, he read about the seven cities of Troy, and about Schliemann, the archaeologist who dug them up. He was fascinated with the idea that a city might simply disappear under the ground, and another city be built right on top of it, and so seven times over; he was equally fascinated with the idea of patiently bringing those buried cities into the light again. This made him want to find out as much as he could about archaeology. When I last heard of him, he was reading everything on that subject that he could get his hands on.

(Holt 1968 p.135)

Appendix B

The B.C. Ministry of Education's "image of an educated person" in 1987 is cited below:

The educated person is one who is a thinking individual, capable of making independent decisions based on analysis and reason. The individual is curious, capable of, and interested in learning, capable of acquiring and imparting information, and able to draw from a broad knowledge base. The individual appreciates and is able to contribute to creative expression. The individual is self-motivated, has a sense of self-worth, pursues excellence, strives to be physically healthy and is able to achieve satisfaction through achievement. The individual has sound interpersonal skills, morals and values, and respects others who may be different, understands the rights and responsibilities of an individual within the family, community, nation, and the world and is aware of Canada's cultural heritage. The individual is flexible and has skills necessary to function in and contribute to the world of work.

(BCTF Teacher Magazine, 1987, Vol. 67, No. 1, p. 22)

Ted Aoki's (1988) description of an educated person:

To me, an educated person, first and foremost, understands that one's ways of knowing, thinking, and doing flow from who one is. Such a person knows that an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto oneself, but is a being-in-relation-with-others, and hence is, at core an ethical being. Such a person knows that being an educated person is more than possessing knowledge or acquiring intellectual or practical skills, and that basically, it is being concerned with dwelling aright in thoughtful living with others.

An educated person thus not only guards against disembodied forms of knowing, thinking, and doing that reduce self and others to being things, but also strives, guided by the authority of the good in pedagogical situations, for embodied thoughtfulness that makes possible a living as a human being.

Moreover, a truly educated person speaks and acts from a deep sense of humility, conscious of the limits set by human finitude and mortality, acknowledging the grace by which educator and educated are allowed to dwell in the present that embraces past experiences but is open to possibilities yet to be. Thus, to be educated is to be ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heeding the call to walk with others in life's ventures.

(Aoki 1998; Pinar and Irwin 2005, p.365).