

Dhaka to The Pas - How'd I get here?

We were visiting friends, Jed & Kim, Jed thought it would be fun to think of songs that sparked a memory, cue the song and share the story. As the evening went on, our songs uncovered bits and pieces of our lives that we likely wouldn't have shared, laughing, shaking our heads in disbelief and getting to know each other in a new way. Thought I'd try it out here.

[Cue music] The song: "Africa" by Toto

It was 1984, I was 20, travelling the world. We walked through the streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, crowds of men surrounded us, pushed against us, staring at us with their mouths hanging open in disbelief. What were two young white women doing in public, not fully covered? We got lost in the maze of men and winding streets. The image of cow patties with handprints in them drying on walls is stamped in my brain, the patties are used for fuel. The smell still lingers in my memory. A kind man and his daughter led us home safely. We followed.

Calcutta. We worked at Mother Teresa's Home for Sick and Dying Children. Walking along the streets to the market, stepping over people who were literally taking their last breath as we discussed what vendor would sew custom pants for us, custom pants. It wasn't until I got back to Canada that I made sense of all this. I became so desensitized to the tremendous poverty, shanty towns, absolute destitution everywhere, that in order for me to function, I ignored what was right in front of me. My own humanity had taken off and left me to fend for my privileged self. I still have those pants, it's like death staring me in the face.

Standing on the side of the road in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, trying to flag down a taxi, no one would stop. Our Ethiopian friend said it was because we were white. I was taken aback and humbled.

[Cue music] The song: "(Looking for) The Heart of Saturday Night" by Tom Waits

It was the early 90s, I decided to go back to university full time after working and traveling: Yellowknife, Taiwan, Hawaii, Samoa, a lot of mucking about. Moved to Waterloo, Ontario from the prairies and lived a complicated life, I was searching for purpose. Listening to Tom, playing pool, didn't want to conform and didn't like authority, I started a new path.

[Cue music] The song: "Fly Away" by Lenny Kravitz

Then came the roaring later 90s. I moved to The Pas to develop the Recreation and Community Leadership Program and teach at KCC (now UCN), a fantastic opportunity. I found a life partner, put my all into work, a definite change of direction and explosion of learning. My inherent gypsy spirit and nomadic lifestyle, baked into my DNA, kept me looking for new adventures to fly away. We took a year and traveled the South Pacific.

[Cue music] The song: "Rehab" by Amy Winehouse

Jumping along 2004ish to 2018ish. I didn't go to rehab but the song reminds me of this 15-year stint based in Calgary. Self-employed, driving forward in full glory, meaningful work and travel, I thought what better time to change things up then when all is going so well? Much of my work with communities across Alberta and sessional teaching at Mount Royal University focused on

the process of change. I determined that I had better truly experience change myself so decided to get out of my comfort zone.

Sculpting, I chose to become a sculptor (are you nuts?) and integrate it with community building. I stepped into a new space that was challenging, it was a major shift for me. At first exploring the idea and sculpting was exhilarating but as contracts dried up the harsh reality of making a living and contributing weighed heavy. I became downright depressed! I believed in the potential, but it was a rough couple of years. I looked for a 'real' job, Home Depot wouldn't even hire me! At the same time I joined the board of a non-profit whose focus is creating a civil society in Ukraine, Canadian Ukrainian Agrarian Development (CUAD), continued to travel, put proposals together, worked on small contracts and created experiences like Nuit Blanche at Clearwater Lake.

[Cue music] The song: "Bella Ciao" an Italian revolution song
Then came 2019, thought I'd take a stab at a long shot job, the closing date had passed, I wasn't sure how flexible the position could be, and it was crime prevention. Crime prevention, how does that fit with sculpting? Well, here I am, working with the tri-community and we are sculpting a way into the future. Community and the creative process, funny how things unfold.

It's a little daunting sharing parts of my story publicly, mostly fear and uncertainty of judgement. Opening up creates a space for conversation and hope too. I hope through the stories we share, you've shared, we can build on the positive and be a little more accepting. Our experiences shape us, thanks for being part of my song-story! Ciao Bella, ciao bella, ciao ciao ciao!

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