

Fathers and Sons

LOOK BACK THROUGH THE YEARS OF YOUR LIFE AND ASK yourself what people influenced and guided you? Most of us will have had many of the same mentors. It might have been a teacher, coach, clergy, neighbor, relative, or someone at work who took the time to teach and encourage us. And of course there were our parents. Maybe even someone we only met once could have been the catalyst for us to reach beyond our potential and, as corny as it sounds, to change the course of our lives.

After I graduated from university I still had no clue what to do with myself. My parents still had two kids in college and mortgage payments to make; there wasn't a lot of discretionary income for them to lavish on their oldest child. But for a graduation present they got me my first real camera, a little 35 mm Pentax. I started shooting concert pictures with it even though I didn't have a clue as to what I was doing.

Concerts in the day and age of film were hard to photograph, especially from the cheap seats. One of the first shows I ever photographed was at the Winterland in San Francisco back in December of 1978. The act that evening was Bruce Springsteen. My pictures were awful, but I did manage to get one or two decent prints from the concert.

My father was a great influence on me, but photography didn't mean much to him. His was a family from austere German and Irish stock. They were teachers and principals — no-nonsense professions. Dad taught seventh and eighth grade for 17 years. I think he hated nearly every minute of it. So, of course, after college I decided to follow in his footsteps — I got a teaching credential. In the late 1970s there were few full-time teaching jobs in the Bay Area. I could only find part-time and substitute teaching positions. "Wait five years and we'll all be retiring," one old-timer once told me. When you're 26 years old, the prospect of having to wait five more years for a full-time job is not what you want to hear. To supplement my income I was working nights and weekends as a stock clerk at a Sears and Roebuck. Unloading tires and batteries from trucks paid a lot better than teaching. Heck, it paid a lot better than my career in television did for many years. I could pay my rent, buy camera equipment and go to concerts. Still there wasn't much direction to my life, and my dad was beginning to worry. Back in the late '70s and into the early '80s musicians were more concerned about the music and not about controlling their image. I'd never even heard of MTV. I'd buy tickets to a concert weeks or even months in advance — getting the best seat that was available. Security back then was only interested in people who might be trying to sneak liquor bottles in. There was no searching of handbags and only cursory body pat-

DECEMBER 15, 1978 WINTERLAND SAN FRANCISCO, CA

downs. Hold your camera under your coat, hand your ticket to the usher and you were in.

At the smaller nightclubs and venues I could wear my cameras dangling from my neck. No one at the door tried to stop me or ever questioned what I was doing. I was just a fan who wanted some souvenir photos. I'd get in line early to get a seat up close. I'd even use a flash. No one ever seemed to mind. Those were innocent times.

Through sheer trial and error my concert pictures began to get better. The Sears store that I worked at had a small coffee shop. You could order a greasy cheeseburger or tuna on toast. It had roaches the size of a quarter that used to crawl across the cash register. I rarely ate there. A young woman by the name of Patty ran the coffee shop. She was of Italian decent, short in stature, with the full figure of a woman who'd borne children. With black hair and a quick, heartfelt laugh she was divorced with two young school aged daughters. She literally had pulled herself up by the apron strings. The coffee shop was the one department that nobody ever wanted to manage and they worked her to the bone. Patty lived in a neighborhood of small, flat-topped frame homes on the other side of the freeway. A neighborhood that was built along the edge of the San Francisco Bay for the GIs returning from the Second World War. It was then, and always has been, a working class community. Her neighbors were an older couple, Douglas and Adele, who looked after Patty's girls when they got out of Catholic school every day. They had moved out to California from New Jersey around the time their only son had graduated from high school. Douglas was a retired bus driver and Adele still worked at a large property management company in town. Their son had been quite successful in the music business; his name was Bruce Springsteen. It was no secret at work that Patty knew the Springsteens. While Bruce had been on both the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek* he wasn't yet the icon he's since become. Eventually I screwed up the courage to show her some of my concert pictures I'd taken at a Springsteen concert the year before. She was impressed; so much so that she thought his parents might enjoy them as well. So one night after work off we went to the home of Bruce



Springsteen's parents. Patty let herself in. A giant ebony grand piano dominated the modest living room. There were only a few small snapshots of the family's famous son above the mantelpiece. I heard Douglas Springsteen before I saw him. His breathing was labored and heavy. He was a short balding man with thick, sausage-like fingers. I wondered if this is what Bruce Springsteen was going to look like in another 30 years. He didn't say much. He looked at my pictures and then took me into a small area just off the living room. The diminutive room was too big to be a closet but too tiny to be much of anything else. It was a shrine. Gold and platinum records hung from the walls. More, still in their cardboard boxes, lay on the floor waiting to be hung. Pictures and scrapbooks from fans lined the shelves. And here I was, another acolyte, bringing my offerings to the altar.

In concerts Bruce Springsteen use to tell a story about the relationship between his father and himself. As a teenager he would be upstairs practicing his guitar and his father would be downstairs yelling at him to turn the volume down. "It was never a Gibson or Fender guitar," recalls Springsteen in concerts, it was always "turn down that goddamned guitar." Yet as Douglas Springsteen showed me around the awards and industry accolades amassed by his son, I couldn't help but feel the pride he held for his boy.

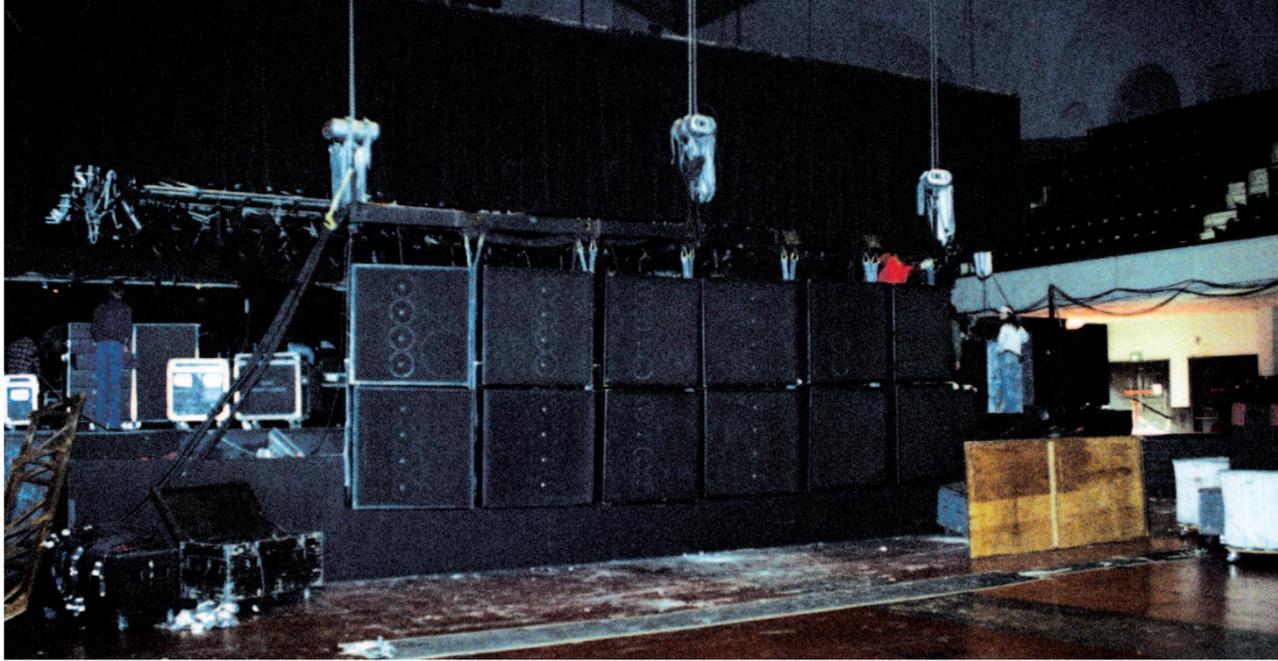
About then Mrs. Springsteen arrived home from work. Whereas Mr. Springsteen was quiet and stoic in the nature of his Dutch heritage, Mrs. Springsteen was expressive and verbal. She was the Italian one. She welcomed

me into her home as if I were a long lost cousin. The pride, devotion and love for her boy were obvious. She oohed and ahed about my pictures. Eventually we settled beside the piano in the middle of their living room. From the bench she pulled out a concert program from a Madison Square Garden show. As she thumbed through it she pointed out all the members of the band to me. "This is so and so," she'd say, "he's married. They're all married," she said, "except Bruce." Spoken like a true mother. In the middle of the program was a two-page photo of her famous son, guitar over his shoulder in a rock and roll pose. The picture was autographed. Mrs. Springsteen was extremely excited about it. How nice, I thought to myself, her famous son must have autographed the program for her. She turned the page towards me and I looked down at the signature inscribed. Surprisingly the autograph was that of John Travolta! She had gotten John Travolta to sign the program for her backstage at the concert. Here you are the mother of a rock and roll legend, but when you get a famous movie star's autograph you're just as giddy as any schoolgirl who's just gotten the high school quarterback to sign her yearbook. By then Patty had gathered her girls up and it was time to leave. My time basking in the hospitality of the Springsteen's was about to end. As we said our good-byes at the door, me with my photos tucked under my arm, Douglas Springsteen said something that would alter my life. Motioning to my pictures he said, "You ought to do this for a living." With that, Patty, her girls and I disappeared into the inky blackness on that long-ago winter evening.

Now I wish there was some way to end this by saying that the story came full circle, but it didn't. In 2003 I got to cover the Grammy Awards in New York City for the television network I was working for at the time. In a way I was shooting concerts again. My producer and I spent many futile hours backstage trying to get some of the nominees to interview with us, Bruce Springsteen being amongst them. Maybe, if the opportunity arose, I would be able to thank the son for the encouragement that the father had offered. We came close, but this business can be a lot like fishing, sometimes the big ones get away. Douglas Springsteen died many years ago. Mrs. Springsteen long ago moved away from the little house down by the freeway. Some sons reach and touch millions. Some fathers reach and touch only a few. In the end, it doesn't really matter how many lives are changed, just that they were. Thanks, Douglas.

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IN DECEMBER 1978, I WAS WORKING at a music trade magazine. In San Francisco a double-whammy was happening: Springsteen was appearing and the historic Winterland was closing. A whole slew of big acts played there in December, with the Grateful Dead playing on December 31. I convinced my editor for the opportunity to interview Springsteen's sound guy, Bruce Jackson. He worked for Clair Bros. out of Lititz, Pa. and was Springsteen's sound engineer in the late '70s and '80s.

On the morning of the show I flew from L.A. to S.F. and met Bruce Jackson around midday at the Winterland while they were setting up. I had no real understanding about the history of the place — even though I had recently seen *The Last Waltz* — and to me it looked like the dingy old former ice rink that it actually used to be. I wasn't impressed. I interviewed Jackson and took some photographs. He invited us to come back after dinner, and we could sit with him on his sound island and watch the show. Nice.

We got back around 7 p.m. and there was a huge line of people outside. We marched through a side door with our backstage passes right

smack in the middle of a thunderous Bill Graham shit-fit. I knew his temper was legendary, and here we were witnessing Bill berating some poor schmoe for God-knows-what in front of quite a few people in the backstage area. When that finally ended we headed up to the green room for snacks and cocktails. The whole band was there, except Bruce; I never ended up meeting him. Even after Graham's tirade, I summoned up the nerve to introduce myself to him. He was perfectly fine to me, but clearly grumpy.

Finally, we went down to watch the show. Nearly four hours later I was a changed man. As you aficionados all know it was December 15, 1978, which would go down in history as one of the high holy days of Springsteen-dom.

That show was broadcast live on KSAN and many other stations up and down the West Coast. While many people were hearing Bruce live for the first time, I was seeing it. And of course that concert broadcast became the most in-demand bootleg in the history of Springsteen bootlegs. I certainly have a copy.

– Michael Murashko, murko@sbcglobal.net

IT WAS A BRISK DECEMBER SAN FRANCISCO EVENING in 1978. Those who huddled before us on line said the queue had begun to form at dawn. As we leaned against a wall outside the old Winterland Ballroom, we heard the chords, drum shots, bass riffs, and the unmistakable vocals of Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band in a lengthy sound check. The promised land, for the first time in my 19 years, was now not that far out of reach.

Four and a half hours after The Boss had taken the stage, slung on his battered Esquire, and shouted out "1-2-3-4!," we floated through the hall like specters, ghosts more alive than the living. Someone shouted "Bruce is God!" as the hall slowly emptied. No one, I mean no one, could deny it.

My friend George's mother had recorded the concert which had been broadcast locally for the thousands unable to get tickets. We drove back to his house and listened to those tapes until sunrise. We hardly spoke.

– Mark J. Davis



Opposite page top: Speaker set-up for Winterland concerts.
Opposite page bottom: Bruce Jackson sets up the soundboard.

