

Hope in The Darkness – my Springsteen Soundtrack Africa 1982–1986

Blinded by the Light..

It's 1982, and I had just left home and moved into the Bulawayo Holiday Inn – my first posting as an apprentice hotel manager for Holiday Inn Southern Africa. Greetings from Asbury Park was introduced to me by Mike – my first boyfriend, and the artwork was on my hotel room wall and the vinyl on the portable record player. On a trip to Malawi to meet his family, the light across the lake was literally blinding and I was full of hope for what my life would become.

Darkness on the Edge of Town

'Block release' at Hotel School in Johannesburg, meeting the other apprentices, and a 'field trip' to Hillbrow where I find Darkness on the Edge of Town for £7.99-priceless given sanctions still on in Rhodesia and American music impossible to find. Badlands quickly became my anthem about our lives in Bulawayo as the war continued to rage with queues for food or petrol rations, curfews and the sound of mortars in faraway skies. Prove it All night became the reality of my working life as my next posting was night manager – dealing with disarming guns as guests checked in, to escorting drunk soldiers off the premises as they partied hard whilst on RnR for the weekend. How I longed for dawn to break and those long dark nights to end, just as we all longed for the war to end and our families and friends to come home safe..

The River

So much hope when the call came from Head Office with news of my next posting to the Riverside Holiday Inn on The Vaal River near Vanderbijlpark in South Africa. No more night shifts and at last the chance to join a kitchen brigade. Little did I know what the reality would bring, as I packed my suitcase and vinyl and twenty four hours was on a plane to Johannesburg after a tearful farewell to Mike. Arriving in the dead of night at staff quarters, securing my door with a chair from the inside and unpacking ready for the 7am kitchen shift, I felt nervous, and alone. The kitchen became the best and worst of times during that apprenticeship – and the river a place of solace whenever I managed to get assigned to the braai breakfast on the Vaal river. The River was the perfect soundtrack providing light and hope. Oh and Mike and I did not survive the long distance.

Born to Run

My apprenticeship ended in Zululand at the Hluhluwe Holiday Inn where I moved in 1984 and left in 1986. After living and working through Cyclone Demoina, and a brief but failed marriage to Greg, I'd revisited Born to Run which became the soundtrack to what felt like a broken heart. Too young to be running a 62 bedroom hotel, life felt overwhelming and dark – it was time to run, hopeful of a new start. So in 1986, I packed a tea-chest with my worldly goods and shipped it with Rennies to England, packed my suitcase and my vinyl, and late one night, I 'ran' through Zululand to Durban where I caught a plane to London escaping the darkness.

I'm on Fire

England was proving harder than I had expected and I didn't really fit in anywhere, especially not Cromer where I had rented a holiday cottage, so I moved to Norwich, starting again, but thinking maybe I could plan a year travelling. In the meantime I spent all my money seeing as much live music as I could. Which is how I found myself in the front row at Wembley Stadium singing my heart out along with thousands of others to Bruce and the E Street Band. How thankful was I to be there, alive and still hopeful, despite all the darkness.

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