

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/7138048@N07/3687813701/></a>Note: This post appeared in the 8/22/2010 issue of the [Austin American-Statesman](http://www.statesman.com/ "Austin American-Statesman") in the [Tales Of The City](http://www.statesman.com/opinion/insight/tales-of-the-city-thank-you-stevie-ray-871860.html "Tales Of The City: Thank you, Stevie Ray Vaughan, For Bringing Me To Austin") column. I have added some additional musings (italics) and video clips to the original article.

Some might call it a journey. Some might call it a life-changing adventure. Whatever name you use, the inspiration for it began many years ago, in a place far removed from the Lone Star State ♦ the Great White North.

The date was August 16, 1984. The place ♦the National Arts Center in Ottawa, Canada, perhaps the perfect acoustic environment for live music. The performers? None other than [Stevie Ray Vaughan and Double Trouble](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stevie_Ray_Vaughan "Stevie Ray Vaughan"). I was 18 years old ♦ sitting there stunned, mesmerized, awestruck by the legendary power of Vaughan♦s expression with a guitar. This was live blues music as I♦d only imagined. If [Austin](http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/ "Austin, Texas"), Texas was producing guitar players (and the blues) like this, then that was something that I had to experience firsthand.

I am not sure that words will ever be able to describe the feelings I had at that time. This was the ♦Couldn♦t Stand The Weather♦ tour, not long after he did his legendary set at the [El Mocambo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Mocambo "El Mocambo") in Toronto (which was recorded and later released on DVD as ♦Live At The El Mocambo♦). This version of ♦Texas Flood♦ is from that performance.

I was fortunate to see Stevie Ray Vaughan a total of four times ♦ as a headliner (Ottawa, 1984), as an opening act for Dire Straits (Ottawa, 1985), and twice on a double bill with [Jeff Beck](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeff_Beck "Jeff Beck") (Toronto and Austin, 1989). Each time was a surreal, otherworldly experience ♦ but I digress.

Fast forward to 1990. I had been a physical therapist for two years and was working in an outpatient sports/orthopedic clinic. In my spare time, I was also a budding guitar player with a love of the blues and a desire to find my own musical nirvana. A visit to Austin told me that this was indeed the place I needed to be. It was hard to describe to friends and family the reasons for moving. It was just a deep inner knowing that this was the right thing to do, the right place to be. At least it made sense to me.

In hindsight, something just called to me. I had written a poem on July 19, 1987 entitled ♦My Soul Rests In Austin♦. Somehow, by that point I just knew. To this day, I really have no reason why I knew. But I did. And with plenty of conviction.

In the wee hours of August 13, 1990, I hopped on a train in Syracuse, New York with my guitar and backpack in hand. A mere 48 hours of riding the rails and I was stepping off the train into the stifling summer heat that is central Texas in August. It was a brave new world.

My first couple of weeks in Austin were filled with the typical domestic activities of getting settled. But live music was a part of the mix. Paging through the Austin Chronicle one day revealed an exquisite treasure: [Eric](http://www.ericjohnson.com/ "Eric Johnson")

Johnson

, live at the [The Steamboat](http://www.austinchronicle.com/gyrobase/Issue/story?oid=oid%3A74004) Steamboat, August 26 and 27. Since August 27 would be my first birthday celebration in Texas, I purchased tickets for both shows. This was to be the formal celebration of my move to Austin, of starting anew, and what better way to do it?

On the night of August 26, I was witness to a stellar performance by Johnson. But I distinctly remember that shortly after midnight, something stirred within me for some strange reason. At the time, I had no earthly clue why.

On Monday, August 27, I awoke to my 25th birthday. I was walking along the Drag that afternoon when I heard someone mention that there would be a candlelight vigil for Stevie Ray Vaughan that evening. This was impossible to fathom. The news reports rolled in - he had died in the early hours of the morning. My gut feeling during Johnson's performance the night before was correct - something was indeed awry in the world.

This is, without a doubt, the eerie part of the story for me. Vaughan died shortly after take-off at 12:50 am on the morning of August 27. In hindsight, that was within minutes of my sense of something happening. Again, no reason why or how this happened. To this day, I am still unable to watch this piece without my mind going back to that gut-wrenching, fateful day - as I sat in Phil's Subs on Guadalupe and heard the first inkling of the news that was about to change the world.

Later that evening, I ventured back to the Steamboat for Johnson's second show. It turned into an impromptu spiritual tribute, a night of many tears, but in some ways a respite from the pain we all were feeling. This was followed by a tribute at Antone's on August 28 with a veritable who's who of the Austin blues scene. The people of the Austin community, musicians and non-musicians alike, mourned his loss with each other. It showed me the strength of the community here.

Fast forward again to 2010. I now have 20 years behind me in Austin, and a lot of water has flowed under a lot of life's bridges. My professional career has blossomed with my company, Smart Sport International - focusing on physical therapy and endurance sports coaching - and the Smart Life Institute. After 20 years of clinical practice, I finally sat down to write a book on my experiences with runners.

Ironically, my office is located in the former home of, yes, the fabled [Austin Rehearsal Complex](http://www.myspace.com/austinrehearsalcomplex) - home of countless Austin musicians in the 1990s. And I have recently rekindled the desire to return my fingers to the fretboard of my trusty guitar. Maybe it's the spirits emanating from the walls of the ARC that serve as a daily reminder that music, one of my passions, opened doors that allowed me to grow in my career, and my life in general.

It never ceases to amaze me how my musical and professional worlds collided in the expanse of the former Austin Rehearsal Complex. I wrote a post about it [here](http://allanbesselink.com/rhubarb/138-studio-5-where-worlds-collide) in 2007.

I initially discovered this place because of my surreal, almost otherworldly experience in Ottawa in 1984. If not for that, I might not have ever discovered that there's so much more to Austin than music. I might not have experienced the sun setting over Mount Bonnell or the cool waters of Barton Springs in August. I might not have experienced the hospitality and good nature of the people of this city. I certainly would not have been witness to countless live music performances and college football games, or any number of things that I have come to take for granted.

If not for one man and his guitar, I would not be writing this essay now.

With that in mind, I thank you, SRV, for introducing me to what is now my home. On my birthday this week, I will pay my respects to you at Auditorium Shores as I

always do. As always, I will be reminded of the fragility of life, of the beauty of expression through the voice of the guitar. I will be reminded of the simple things in life, the things that are often forgotten but so needed on a daily basis. And I will be reminded of your words - to live each day like it is your last performance.

I am forever thankful of that one fateful night in 1984 when a skinny young Texan spoke to me through his Fender Strat with the fire and brimstone of a preacher, showing me the purity of Texas blues. It was the meaning found between the notes that sent me on an adventure, on a life-changing journey that truly brought me home.

Photo credit: [jjwright85 on Flickr](#) and [www.lifeofjustin.com](#)

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Addendum: I wrote a poem entitled ["In Memory of Stevie Ray - by Allan Besselink"](#)

<http://www.allanbesselink.com/studio/poems-and-lyrics/436-in-memory-of-stevie-ray> In Memory Of Stevie Ray in 1991. I found that it took me a year to be able to remotely put into words what all of it meant to me. I've not shared it with the world until today. Now, twenty years later, this essay found its way into print as a tribute to my experience, my journey and ultimately, to finding my home. I hope that the words can provide solace to those whose lives were forever changed by SRV in his life, and in his passing. And, if nothing else, to serve as a reminder to live each day as though it's your last performance.

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