

Springsteen's going to play at a bar in New Jersey.

At least that was the rumour Gord Hunter heard. "So I went." And yes, a possible Springsteen sighting was all it took for Gord to hop in his car and make the seven hour drive to New Jersey the way you or I might drive to the corner store. Springsteen didn't show, but the next night Gord went to a different bar and happened to hear a roots/rocker named Joe D'Urso.

"He was great," says Gord. "I approached him afterwards and told him he should come to Canada. He said 'OK. Book me a show'. I hadn't the faintest idea how to do that, but that didn't stop me." Gord cold called the famous Horseshoe Tavern in Toronto and managed to get Joe booked there, as well as in Ottawa and at Brandee's in Kingston. "I became Joe's booker for Canada, we became great friends, and had memorable trips and adventures." But more on that later.

Gord was born in Lindsay, Ont. in 1963 to Art and Kathy Hunter. He's bracketed by sisters Christine and Jeannie. His grandfather, Trooper Arthur Hunter, fought with a Scottish cavalry unit at the Battle of the Somme. Arthur emigrated to Canada after The Great War but Gord still feels a strong connection to his Scottish roots.

The family moved to Deseronto for six years - ("I hated it.") - and then to a farm in Selby. Gord's mother died in 2019 and they scattered her ashes at the family's off-the-grid cottage at Beaver Lake, one of Gord's "favourite places in the world".

A husky, athletic-looking guy, Gord has always loved sports and still plays hockey three times a week. But in grade seven he discovered a second lifelong passion - music. "Kids were told to pick an instrument," remembers Gord. "Every boy wants to play the drums, but I grabbed them first and didn't let go."

"While still in public school we got to go to Napanee Secondary twice a week to take music classes from a great guy, Rick Wilson. He'd played with the Everly Brothers for heaven's sake," Gord exclaims. "How he ended up in Napanee I don't know, but I'm glad he did. Mr. Wilson's music room became a haven for a bunch of us all through high school. We talked music, played music, lived and breathed music."

Music has never been Gord's primary career, but it's been an essential part of his life ever since, whether playing drums with various cover bands, managing performers, or attending hundreds of concerts. "It opened up a whole new world for me - a world of fun and travel and lifelong friends. Thirty years after graduation I called Mr. Wilson from our high school reunion and told him how much he'd meant to me. He gave me a gift that I've carried with me to this day."

After high school Gord took a course in radio broadcasting at Loyalist College in Belleville. This led to a job as a production assistant at CKLC in Kingston in 1985. "I produced commercials and shows. It was fun but it was no way to make a living." Gord had got married by this point to Sharlene Masterson, a fellow Loyalist student - "We were way too young" - and felt pressure to be a bread winner.

"My dad was a manager at Strathcona Paper near Napanee so I had an in. The pay cheque dwarfed what I was making at CKLC. I thought I'd work there for a few months, build up a nest egg, and move on." But before long a daughter, Shannon, was on the way. A son, Daniel, followed three years later. (Shannon is now a social media manager in Vancouver. Daniel is a lawyer in Toronto.)

Gord ended up working at Strathcona Paper for 11 years.

Eventually there was a strike. "I'd become active in the union," says Gord. "It gave me my first taste of understanding

management, which stood me in good stead in my later career. But as soon as the strike ended I was handed my pink slip. It was almost a relief.

"I respected the people who worked at Strathcona Paper. It was hard work, honest work. It just wasn't for me. I felt as if I'd wasted 11 years. If I hadn't got laid off who knows where I'd be today. I still have an anxiety dream where I'm back on the plant floor in my sock feet, anxiously looking for my steel-toed boots.

"To mark that occasion I got this." Gord rolls up his sleeve, revealing a tattoo of Red Converse All Star sneakers hanging on a guitar. He explains that the image commemorates his two passions - sports and Springsteen. (He hadn't met Ginette yet.) "It's a constant reminder to me not to waste my time on things I don't enjoy, to follow my passions."

Speaking of passions, you can't talk to Gord for long before the name Bruce Springsteen comes up. In his blog ([gordhunter.ca](http://gordhunter.ca)) Gord writes about being consumed by Springsteen's music as a not entirely happy teenager, "sitting alone in my dark bedroom for hours, clutching Springsteen's *The River* like a holy tome. His music reached into the best and worst parts of me. It spoke to the boy I was and the man I wanted to be."

Gord is now coming up on his 100th Springsteen concert. There's a visceral connection there that goes beyond merely saying that Springsteen is his favourite singer. He and his wife Ginette actually appear in a Springsteen video *We Take Care of Our Own*. And, of course, looking for Springsteen led Gord to Joe D'Urso.

"A few years after we met, Joe called and said he needed a manager for a Scottish tour. Scotland! I accepted on the spot. They also needed to find a drummer for the opening act. I said:

'I can do that too.' So that's how I became a driver/tour manager/drummer in my ancestral homeland."

On the first of two tours, in 2001 they drove up from England. "When we crossed the border into Scotland, I stopped and just soaked it in. It felt like coming home." Gord has been back numerous times since and has made many friends there. Ever mindful of his Scottish heritage, he and Ginette even make vegan haggis. "Just like mom used to make - without the offal."

To Gord music is more than an avocation and a refuge. It's a way of giving back. Through Joe D'Urso, Gord became deeply committed to Light of Day, a charitable concert series founded in 2000. Now in 13 countries, it uses the power of music to raise money and awareness to battle Parkinson's disease. Gord has volunteered as a board member, media and artist coordinator, and director of Light of Day Kingston, where he ran concerts and tripled revenues between 2013 and 2018. And the Light of Day flagship show in Asbury Park, New Jersey, often featuring (you guessed it) The Boss, is an annual pilgrimage.

It was while driving home from that concert in 2014 with Emily Fennell - "Miss Emily" to her many fans - that Gord struck a deal with her to manage her very successful career, which he still does.

Meanwhile, in his non music life, Gord had moved to Kingston in 1988. After being booted from Strathcona Paper in 1997 he enrolled at St. Lawrence College, earning a diploma in information technology. This landed him a job at Hummingbird where he worked for two years as a software specialist.

"Hummingbird was a great place to work and gave me skills I've used ever since. I left for a job at the Upper Canada District School Board in Brockville but probably should have stayed longer."

Returning to Kingston, Gord first worked for Prevention Awareness for Life, helping kids with life skills, and getting his toe wet in the not-for-profit world "where I've been ever since. I think it suits me."

By necessity, much of this work involves fund raising and Gord showed a knack for that from the outset, often leveraging his musical connections for the benefit of various non-profits. For Prevention Awareness for Life, he scored a Springsteen-signed guitar which was raffled off for \$7,800. Later, for the Kingston Humane Society, he did the same with a guitar signed by The Tragically Hip.

Moving on, Gord became Communications Director for the World Breast Cancer Organization. When the executive director took ill Gord was thrown into the top job "and I realized I had some management skills. I could do it." Among his accomplishments was conceiving a national "Building a Pink Ribbon Highway" campaign which became the largest single-day fundraising event ever for the WBCO.

Following this, Gord became the manager of the building campaign for the Ottawa Humane Society. "I liked the job and we raised over 2.4 million. But my marriage to Sharlene was ending and I wasn't crazy about living in North Gower." Returning to Kingston in 2008, Gord served as Executive Director of Martha's Table, again exceeding their fundraising targets. He then moved on to become Branch Manager of St. John Ambulance.

Gord really enjoyed his ten years there and wasn't looking to leave "but the perfect job - Executive Director of the Kingston Humane Society - just dropped in my lap."

"I'm proud to say that every non-profit I've worked for contributes to society. But the Humane Society is the closest to my heart. In a sense it's the job I've been waiting for my whole life."

"I grew up with animals. Starting with my first dog Rocky, animals have always provided happiness and comfort, in good times and bad. It would be simplistic to say that animals can cure depression, but I truly believe they can sense our feelings, our sadness. After a stressful episode, I'll put a kitten or puppy on my lap and soon feel better.

"How we treat animals reflects on us as a society. We share the world with them, but so often we ignore them, neglect them, mistreat them. It's tremendously rewarding to lead an organization dedicated to finding homes for animals where they'll receive - and give - unconditional love. Call me a sap, but I believe every home is a little bit better with an animal (or two) in it." (For more, check out Gord's blog on the Kingston Humane Society site.)

Gord became a vegetarian shortly after he met Ginette in 2008. "I haven't wavered since," he says. "I haven't missed meat at all." He became vegan in 2019 when he took over at the Humane Society. "It's hard to look at animals you're caring for all day and see other animals as a food source. Ginette and I aren't judgmental about it. It's just our choice."

In person Gord comes across as personable, professional and pulled together - even businesslike. No doubt these are valuable assets in the management leadership jobs he's held. But he also writes a "creative blog" which reveals a more vulnerable, introspective and emotional side. He admits bursting into tears at the plight of an animal or upon hearing a particularly meaningful song. Although Gord's professional writing has been limited to a stint as a reporter at the now defunct Heritage Newspaper and pieces for the Whig and local media, he refers to himself as a "writer at heart". This shows quite clearly in his blog.

Gord writes openly (and I'd say courageously) about battling depression. Like Hemingway, he calls it the Black Dog, and says it reared its head for close to 10 years in the nineties. "You pull away from people," he says. "You have no sense of self esteem. No reason to get up in the morning." He talks about hitting rock bottom one cold night alone on Queen's Quay in Toronto, looking down at the icy surface of Lake Ontario and feeling the urge to give in to the darkness, give in to the Black Dog. But he didn't. And dawn eventually came.

Gord credits therapist Chris Whynot for helping him to get through depression. "It's not a disease you get cured of," says Gord. "You just deal with it. You keep the Black Dog from the door. Conventional psychiatry and drugs just didn't work for me. But Chris helped me immensely. Now I feel I've moved beyond it to the best time of my life. I'm contributing to my community, doing things I love, with someone I love. It's pretty incredible, considering where I was."

As for the "someone I love", the name Ginette has cropped up throughout this piece. Let's let Gord introduce her properly.

"It was my birthday. My buddy Tim Keenleyside had tickets for George Thorogood at the K-Rock. But I wasn't in a good place. The last thing I wanted to do was go out. Tim had to drag me to the Merchant for a drink. He said he was expecting a friend - and Ginette Blais walked in. And a miserable night turned into a great one.

"Our first date was July 18, 2008. While Ginette made dinner I browsed her CD collection and, wouldn't you know, I spotted - no, not a Springsteen CD - but a Joe D'Urso CD! I grabbed it and showed her the liner notes like a little kid. 'Look! There's my name! That's me!' Luckily this childish attempt to impress her didn't put her off too much - and the rest is history.

"Happy history."

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Doug Bowie

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