

Removing Barriers

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Since, my friend, you have revealed your deepest fear,

I sentence you to be exposed before your peers:

Tear down the wall.

-- from "The Trial" by Roger Waters

from *The Wall*, Pink Floyd

In August 2002, I took my mostly annual summer trip to the Midwest, visiting family and friends in both Iowa City and the Twin Cities. On my return flight to New York City, my connection out of O'Hare found me in a window seat, with a man to my left glancing in my direction. We struck up a conversation, which turned quickly to music and specifically to the album *The Wall* by the progressive rock band Pink Floyd. This epic recording about emotional walls constructed in response to one's environment had been perhaps the most influential album of my childhood.

Toward the end of the flight, having discussed many topics, Dave gave me a CD player and headphones: "Check this out," he said, giving me no clue as to what it was. Steel guitar and violin—this was fine country music. But, then I heard familiar lyrics, "So ya, thought ya, might like to go to the show..." Unbelievable! The first song from *The Wall*?—this was *The Wall* in its entirety — rebuilt by a *country* band! Shivers tingled up and down my spine: such an unexpected and generous gift this was to hear Luther Wright and the Wrongs performing on our descent to La Guardia!

Four days later, I stopped in at Tower Records and purchased *Rebuild The Wall*, anxiously awaiting my chance to hear this newly conceptualized concept album. On account of weekend repairs, a brief subway ride left me stranded at the 96th Street station, leaning over the tracks for evidence of another uptown train. Another man was leaning, too. Disheveled in appearance, he soon removed his grimy sweatshirt to reveal a T-shirted message: Pink Floyd...*The Wall*! I breached the invisible barrier: "I noticed your shirt and thought you might be interested," I said, showing him the CD. "It's *The Wall* as country music, and it's not some sort of joke, either," I explained. He was instantly receptive, "Wow, really? My mom likes country music. Maybe *she'd* like this version," he replied with a gap-toothed smile. He was soon excitedly describing the many live shows he'd attended of various groups. As we boarded the next train, I removed the cellophane wrapper and we viewed the band photos and liner notes. I kept thinking: *Only four days earlier, a stranger on a plane...*

At the 125th Street station, my acquaintance stepped out and said goodbye. As he did, I handed him the compact disc. "Here. I want you to have it." "But it's yours...how will you get another one?" "Don't worry about that. Consider it a gift." The doors closed. As the train pulled away, I watched as he stared intently at the CD, clutching it with both hands. Indeed, music is about sharing, about removing the barriers between us; and, in that moment, I learned that sharing is about letting go of our walls.