

# HARD LIVING

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"That's the song that put me on the streets," he said trying to convince the band to let him get up and sing Burton Cummings's "Break It To Them Gently."

When he first came in the bar he was wearing a jean jacket, no shirt, and a backwards headband. He had "hard living" written all over him. He said he was originally from New Waterford, but that was before he ended up on the streets.

He warmed up to the band, who was also from Cape Breton, right away. During their set of vintage riff rock, he demonstrated kung-fu fighting style dance moves complete with punches and kicks. He liked the band. He told them to call him Horse. When the lead guitar player jumped up on a table to perform a solo, Horse joined him almost tipping over several drinks when the table went off balance. When he saw his opportunity before the band's second set, he jumped up on stage and asked politely if he could sing a song.

*Break it to them gently when you tell my mom and dad. When you see my baby sister...(He would struggle with his memory for a bit to find the next verse, but then just skip to the chorus.)...Because I'm running with a gun and it isn't any fun as a fugitive. God I want to go home, Lord I wish I was home.*

A desire to return home to New Waterford brought Horse to Charlottetown. He spent the past couple of months begging on the streets of Toronto, but he had enough and was on his way home. The city did mean things to him. He had to "do what he could" just to survive. He didn't specify exactly what this meant, but mentioned that on a good day he'd make around eight hundred dollars. What he spent this money on was not clear either. He claimed to sleep in the corridor of a bank machine. In Toronto he got to sleep in until eleven o'clock on most days, but since the Scotia Bank in Charlottetown opens early, he had to get up at six while he was in town.

He claimed to have thirty kids that he wanted to see again for Christmas. It's been years since he's seen them. He

received Email from them when he was in jail. But the guards erased the memory from his computer, and he lost track of how to contact his children. It was especially hard to remember where all thirty of them were.

Halfway through the chorus of "Break It To Them Gently" Horse's mind sadly wandered. The band, having no clue how to play this song attempted to find the correct chord progression and rhythm to keep up with him, but like Horse, they were lost. Everything came together, however, when Horse ripped into John Denver's "Country Roads." The confused bass player and guitar player were finally on the same page as Horse and this impromptu open mic performance came together.

The band liked Horse because unlike the usual drunk guy who grabs the microphone during a show and doesn't know when to leave the stage, Horse did not wear out his welcome. As soon as the last note of his "Break It To Them Gently"/ "Country Roads" medley rang out, Horse sat down at the table near the stage. He leaned over to the lead singer's girlfriend and said, "If you weren't married to one of those guys, I'd be all over you." Respect for both the girl, and his friend in the band. The band invited him on stage again later to try the medley again.

*Because I'm running with a gun and it isn't any fun. I'm a fugitive. Fighting for my life and I don't know if I'll make it alone.*

Horse said he had a bad habit of getting into fights. They were never his fault. He just did what he had to do. That's how he ended up in jail. Other people were always getting him into trouble. If he gets caught, he's going back to finish the two year sentence he is running away from. At the end of the bar a young guy with a black mohawk and a leather jacket orders a drink. Horse hollers over to him from the end of the bar, "You remind me of myself when I was your age. I'd take you home with me, but I don't want to go back to jail." I doubt if the young man was disappointed, but at least Horse broke it to him gently.