

# The Girls / Boys and The Band

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There might've been a dead wasp on the window that day, its body squished to a flat sort of circle, guts in its face. There were always dead wasps in summer. Had it been alive, it would've been the single member of our audience. But as it stood, we were playing to an empty, sticky, dust swirled shed in a village 30 miles from Bristol in 2003.

I was seven, nearly eight, and sweating through my un-brushed thick, frizzy hair, rivulets of it settling damp at my lower back—my white round neck t-shirt clinging a little tighter, ovals of salty saturation between my shoulder blades. It was probably the wrong move to wear the khaki combat trousers too—sticky behind the knees. But I was in a band, and when you're in a band, you've got to make those sorts of sacrifices—you've got to look the part. That was my rule of thumb.

Behind me my cousin, the other member of the band, in a similar sort of outfit, would be pressing buttons on the stacked CD player that doubled as a tape deck and radio. We never played tapes, and we had no idea how to tune in the radio. We'd spin the silver tuner round and round, listening to the white noise fizzle in and out, catching only the smallest section of scant voices before losing them again. The antenna was broken on it. We didn't know that then.

I'd watch her intently, eyes on her fingers, trying to see what buttons she was pressing, if I could remember for next time. She was older than me by two years [she still is]. At the age of seven, it felt like she knew it all. If I knew about a country she'd know about the world. If I knew about a planet, she'd be able to recall the whole solar system—the big dipper to Uranus, the latter always said with a childish giggle.

Another button was pressed, then, without facing me, she'd ask, "You ready?"

"Yeah", I'd say it confident, "I'm ready."

She'd nod, then I'd remember the important question.

"What we playing?"

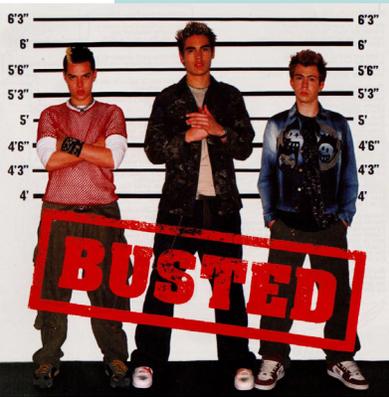
Next to the CD player was a wooden four drawer narrow chest. About the height of three adult sized hands stacked on top of one another—about a hand wide. Enough to keep CDs in. She'd flick through it whilst I set up the room, moving the tatty rug on the floor so I wouldn't trip over it once the manic dancing starting. I'd make sure the mic stand was propped in just the right spot. We had a mic, but it never really worked—the wires would fall out from over-stretching them across the shed or we just wouldn't bother to plug it in at all—my voice could carry without it.

"Busted?"

I loved Busted. Unapologetically. I'd keep my response nonchalant for now.

"Okay, cool."

Busted was nearly always the band of choice. Sometimes we went for The Corrs. Other times Bon Jovi. Even a little Bryan Adams. Or, when couldn't decide, a compilation CD that had everything from Westlife to Weezer; I'd sing their track "Beverly Hills" without



**Busted**

"What I Go to School For"

*Busted*

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Universal Island Records

having any idea that Beverly Hills was a real place you could visit—or live. To me, it just existed in a song.

Before pressing play she'd settle herself behind her drum kit. A red wine thing, Pearl or Yamaha, her drumsticks kept in a holder screwed onto one of the cymbal stands. She could [can] play the drums properly, thanks to lessons from a young age. She'd pick up whichever sticks took her fancy and run them along the toms, snare, cymbals—feet at the high hat and bass drum—warming herself up as though we were in sound check. I'd reach for my instrument. The snooker cue was propped in the dusty nook between the door and the right-side wall. It wasn't full size—a miniature one instead, perfect for me. I'd set the heavy end in my right hand, the tip out towards my left, held about half-way down. I couldn't play the guitar for real, so the snooker cue it was, rigged up as though it was a Stratocaster, or something like the guitar Avril Lavigne played in the "Complicated" video. If I wasn't in khakis and a white t-shirt I'd be in baggy trousers and a tank top with my dad's tie floating around my neck, just like her—the image of righteous adolescence.

I'd set myself steady up to the mic once her warmup was over, snooker cue gripped tight. She'd ask, "You ready now?"

"Yeah...we're playing 'What I Go to School For,' right?"

She'd pop out a "Yep" and then lean over and press play before quickly settling back into her seat, the leather creaking slightly. She'd sing along with me, but I was always up front. Count to three and the track started.

*Her voice is echoed in my mind,  
I count the days till she is mine.*

We'd both start softly, quiet—voices tinged with an American lilt, the same as the boys of Busted. You couldn't sing stuff in a Yorkshire accent like mine, or a semi-sort of Somerset accent like hers, it'd sound all wrong.

*And I'd fight my way in front of class,  
To get the best view of her ass.*

I didn't realize quite what I was singing, drawling out the "s" on "ass," myself innocent with youth. Maybe she understood a bit more, being a little older.

*I drop a pencil on the floor,  
She bends down and shows me more.*

We'd sung this song to both sets of our parents. They didn't seem to mind. I suppose if they had minded, then they would've had to tell us why. And then there'd be no more Busted and a syrupy spoonful of embarrassment.

The chorus was our big moment. We'd watched plenty of music videos and live performances on MTV and VH1 to know you go big in the chorus and keep it steady on the verse. My lips would brush the mic, my hands pretending to strum all sorts of chords and riffs and notes of things I didn't understand. She'd be on-beat with the drums though.

*That's what I go to school for,  
Even though it is a real bore,*

*You can call me crazy,  
But I know that she craves me.*

I'd never change the pronouns. I didn't know what a pronoun was. I didn't know what "craves" meant either.

*Girlfriends I've had plenty,  
None like Miss Mackenzie.*

I didn't care for girlfriends or boyfriends. None of that stuff mattered. By this point we'd be screaming the song. Or I would. Spinning around, knocking the mic stand over after twirling around it and into it manically, doing hair flips into head bangs, shaking my seven-year-old brains loose—the snooker cue slipping out of my grip. My cousin would be on par too, hands flying with the drumsticks, head knocking back and forth, her curly hair getting more and more knotted as she went. I'd turn and sing, no, yell the song in her face, my chin coming to a near bloody miss with the crash cymbal.

We'd repeat in all in the next verse, into the chorus again, reaching the bridge, or hook, breathlessly.

*I can see those tell-tale signs,  
Telling me that I was on your mind,  
I could see that you wanted more when you told that  
I'm what you go to school for.*

Then we'd fall into the final round of the chorus. I'd jump high in time to the music, knees bent, feet ready to slam back onto the tatty rug on the wooden floor, knocking the mic stand over again with the weight of my wild landing.

I'd imagine I was one of the members of Busted whilst singing "What I Go to School For." Matt, the bass player, most likely—spiky tipped hair and a snarling face—snarling in a teen way, all bravado without the bite, eyes roaming everywhere. We'd often pretend to be different people if we decided not to be ourselves. Different boys and girls in the band, whoever we felt like being. Gender didn't matter. It never registered as something to care about when I was seven. I had bigger things to think about, like remembering lyrics.

The song would fizzle out then, and my cousin would move quick to press the pause button before the next track started. She'd take a heavy breath and I'd wipe my sweaty hands down the front of my even stickier t-shirt, beads of sweat sliding from the back of my wispy hair and onto my hot neck. We'd often forget to take drinks up to the shed and instead we'd end up chasing each other back to the house for a glass of juice or, if we were lucky, a can of cold Coke. But that was after a few songs. We'd only performed "What I Go to School For" once. It wasn't time for a break yet.

"We sounded good, right?"

My cousin would nod enthusiastically. "Yeah, really good."

"Wanna play it again?" I'd ask. I always asked her before deciding. I asked her a lot for her opinion on things. Opinions or permission. Both.

"Same song?"

"Uh huh."

"Yeah, okay, cool."

And we'd go again, singing until our voices were hoarse. Or until the sun filtered past the high trees directly opposite us and we were told to come back inside and eat our dinner by my uncle.

Propped up on the high kitchen table we'd rabbit on over our turkey dinosaurs and chips about our band. All sorts of dreamy ideas about how we could make it big time whilst dipping every item of food on our plates into blobs of watery tomato ketchup.

"You'd probably have to start playing guitar for real though," she'd say.

I'd agree. She was right.

"But you'd do it easy. And then we'd get gigs."

"You think so?"

"Definitely. We'd be way more famous than Busted. And anyway, we already play 'What I Go to School For' better than them. We'll make it. I know it."

And I believed her too. I even taught myself how to play the bass guitar.