When They Said Sit Down, I Stood Up:
Springsteen’s Social Conscience, Activism,
and Fan Response

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Bruce Springsteen’s increasing politicization from supporting other musicians’ causes (No Nukes, We Are the World, Amnesty International, Christic Institute) to social issues he personally embraces (local concerns such as the 3M plant closing, St. Rose of Lima and Rumson Day School fundraisers, benefit concerts for police and firefighters and their families) inspires audiences to follow his lead with charitable causes. Whether donating food, money, or labor to community food banks, raising money for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund for cancer research, or saving the Tillie façade on Palace Amusements, Springsteen’s fans draw inspiration from his example. Yet dissension among fans arose when Bruce joined Vote for Change to actively campaign for John Kerry. This paper explores the interplay between Bruce’s activism and fan reaction.

From singing at the No Nukes concerts to food bank exhortations from the stage to actively campaigning for John Kerry, Bruce Springsteen has consciously and thoughtfully selected the causes he supports and speaks out on behalf of. Although Bruce played at a benefit for presidential candidate George McGovern in 1972, he did not involve himself in politics or causes, keeping a low profile. Beginning with the Musicians United for Safe Energy (M.U.S.E.) anti-nuclear benefit concerts, September 22-23, 1979, filmed and released as No Nukes, Bruce’s association with grassroots activism and benefit concerts set the stage for his first phase of charitable work—showing up and playing music. By lending his musicianship to the benefit, Bruce implied that he supported the anti-nuclear movement yet he did not speak out on M.U.S.E.’s behalf either in the concert program or from the stage. Fans did not associate him with a “cause” but rather came to see him as if it was any other concert.

Bruce’s first oblique political statement from the stage occurred on November 5, 1980 in Tempe, Arizona, one day after Ronald Reagan’s election as President of the United States. He began the show by saying, “I don’t know what you guys think about what happened last night, but I think it’s pretty frightening. You guys are young, there’s gonna he a lot of people depending on you comin’ up, so this is for you.” He then swung into “Badlands.” Ronald Reagan again raised his head into Bruce’s rear-view mirror when he told a group of supporters in rural Hammondtown, New Jersey, on the re-election campaign trail in 1984, that “America’s future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts; it rests in the message of hope in songs so many young Americans admire: New Jersey’s own Bruce Springsteen. And helping you make those dreams come true is what this job of mine is all about.” Bruce responded a couple of days later on stage in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on September 22, 1984: “The President was mentioning my name the other day, and I kinda got to wondering what his favorite album musta been. I don’t think it was the Nebraska album. I don’t think he’s been hearing to this one,” as he launched into “Johnny 99.” While the barbed comments followed by those particular songs’ implied criticism of the president, Bruce placed himself in the ob-
server/commentator position after the election rather than as a pro-active campaigner for the opposition.

In contrast to Bruce’s distancing himself from presidential politics, his awareness and activism for local charitable causes developed at the same time. After reading Ron Kovic’s book, *Born on the Fourth of July*, about his experiences in Vietnam, Bruce discussed with Bobby Muller, founder of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, using one of his concerts as a benefit for the VVA. Thus began Bruce’s active relationship with the VVA, and the benefit concert on August 20, 1981 raised $100,000. It was the first time he publicly explained why he was doing the benefit. Veteran Victor Pappert, Jr. commented in August 1985 that Bruce had done much to focus attention on the plight of the Vietnam veteran.6

The LuckyTown Digest and the Kristen Ann Carr Fund

The “pledge break” during Bruce’s regular concerts starting with the *Born in the USA* Tour became a mantra repeated nightly to the crowd encouraging them to support the designated local charity. When Bruce agreed to meet with Ron Weisen, president of the United Steelworkers of America Local 1397 of Homestead, Pennsylvania, in 1984, Weisen introduced him to the Steelworkers Food Bank charity and told him who to see if he’s in Seattle and who to see in other cities. Thus began his affiliation with local food banks in cities wherever he performed.7 Bruce contributed over a million dollars to community action projects in the cities he visited while on the 1985 leg of this world tour.8

Eric Alterman quotes Bruce as saying, “I set out to find an audience that would be a reflection of some imagined community that I had in my head, that lived according to the values in my music and shared a similar set of ideals.” Alterman has noted that “Springsteen’s relationship with his fans is, from a moral standpoint, his most sacred trust.”9 The online fans of one discussion group, LuckyTown Digest (formerly called Backstreets), repaid this trust a thousandfold when they took to heart the Kristen Ann Carr Fund as their personal charity. As a forum for discussing everything from top five favorite Bruce songs, to concert reviews, swapping bootleg concert recordings, and personal encounters with Bruce, Backstreets/Luckytown offered fans a place to meet online as individuals and as a community, and share their mutual love of all things Springsteen.10

On the LuckyTown discussion list, a group of fans responded to the charitable call. They took up the cause of the Kristen Ann Carr Fund (KACF), initially fundraising among themselves in an annual donation drive, then regularly auctioning concert tickets and memorabilia to raise money for cancer research to honor the memory of Dave Marsh and Barbara Carr’s daughter, a friend and fan of Bruce. At the last concert of Bruce’s Human Touch/Lucky Town Tour at Madison Square Garden, June 26, 1993, Springsteen told the audience:

We’re here tonight for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund. Kristen Ann was my good friend, and the daughter of my good friend, who died recently from a sarcoma cancer that not that much is known about. We’re here tonight, we’re going to be raising some funds so we can hire a doctor to study that thing full time. I want to thank you all for your help, and tonight it’s not so much that we’re here tonight to mourn her loss, but to celebrate her memory, and all those who are out there tonight and out there struggling against this disease every day.”11

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Alterman credits Mary-Ellen Breton as the sole organizer of an ongoing annual online auction of Springsteeniana to raise money for the KACF.\textsuperscript{13} For all the deserved praise, Mary-Ellen would be the first to acknowledge that she did not originate the idea on LuckyTown nor run the auction alone. How the LuckyTown Digest subscribers came together to support one of Bruce's personal charities demonstrates these fans' positive reactions to Bruce's exhortations.

Initial reaction to Bruce's participation in the KACF benefit ran along the lines of one fan who was more interested in getting to meet Bruce than caring about the charity. He wrote on the Backstreets listerv:

After hearing about the Silver Circle tickets available for the MSG show, I thought this could be the one chance I'll ever have to meet the MAN but $1000/ticket was way too much. I talked to my wife about it and she decided that would be her gift to me for our wedding anniversary. . . . After making the $1000 donation to the Kristen Ann Carr Foundation I find out that there may be more than a 1000 people in the silver circle. I'm pleased that over 1 million will be raised just on these seats but at the same time a little disappointed about my chances of meeting Bruce. (I figured there would only be ~100 people).\textsuperscript{14}

In an October 5, 1994 post, "Luckyman," later identified as Chris McCormick, offered up the idea of the Luckytown fans raising money for the KACF when he wrote:

- Had a thought while reading Dave Marsh's post re the K.A. Carr fund. The digest has like 900+ subscribers, why don't we start a drive to raise some money for the fund, 5 bucks a head won't break anyone and would be a nice donation if everyone chipped in, hell we could even do a buck or two a head....most people have heard that show on boot, it's a great one so why not help out a little?

- Let everyone kick this around, I'm sure we could do something. I'd be willing to volunteer as a helper or whatever, and I'll start the ball rolling by pledging 20 bucks...less than a single CD boot, so who's game?\textsuperscript{15}

Jack Boyle concurred and suggested:

I think it's a great idea. Collect a bunch of checks made out to the KAC Fund, funnel them to one person, and deliver them in a bunch to Dave. All we need is a volunteer....preferably someone with a real name <g>.

Put me down for $20.\textsuperscript{16}

List administrator Kevin Kinder agreed that it was a good idea and volunteered to collect the donations. He realized the power of a group effort and suggested:

A few other people have followed up on this post, it sounds like at least a couple people would like to do this as a group thing rather than making individual donations. . . . I'm not going to ask anyone to contribute anything, I think everybody makes a personal decision of where they want to direct their charity. But if anyone wants to participate, they can send contributions of any size to me . . . and I'll make a block donation from the Luckytown list with all of the contributors' names listed, except for anyone who might indicate a desire to remain anonymous. Putting "KAC" somewhere on the outside of the envelope will help.\textsuperscript{17}
When one member questioned the group approach, Kevin responded in a parenthetical note: "Certainly individual donations are every bit as effective, but there's definitely interest in the 'larger scale' too."  

Bryon Jordan suggested donating time instead of money:

I've always felt kind of funny about giving money as a donation. While it is needed to support a worthy cause, I have always preferred to donate my time to organizations.

My question is directed to Dave Marsh. Is there a way for people like myself on the list who could donate their time in any way to help out? There are many causes that actually prefer the time commitment by people than the money.

Luckyman stated, "5 bucks a head won't break anyone," and he's right. Five bucks is the equivalent of 2 blank tapes. But there is no equivalent to the time that a person can put in to help an organization. It could be something as simple as writing a member of Congress (for those of us in the U.S.) or whatever.

Please let us know Dave.

I sent the question to the digest in hopes the answer can be posted for everyone.  

After all the discussion, Kevin, feeling already committed to the idea, sent out a notice on LuckyTown on October 14, 1994, officially launching the first KACF fundraiser:

We (the LuckyTown mailing list) are mounting a drive to raise money for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund. This is the first time that we've attempted such a group charitable effort, and I've volunteered to be the collection point.  

John Hocking explained his reasoning for participating in the first LuckyTown Digest KACF donation drive:

Although I rarely give to non-local charities, here's why I made an exception.

What have I done for Bruce? Bought all his records, attended every concert I could, and talked about him and his music to anyone who was interested, and a few people who probably weren't, for the last 16+ years. In short, I've been a good fan. Big deal.

What has Bruce done for me? Given me tens of thousands of hours of pleasure and enriched my life immeasurably and irrevocably every day for the same 16+ years.

So how does the balance sheet work out? . . . Ok, Bruce, you owe me.

Just kidding. Obviously, Bruce has done a thousand times more for me than I for him. So I'm sending a small donation (via Kevin) in memory of Kristen Ann Carr, Bruce's friend, as a small gesture of sympathy to those who knew and loved her, but also as a symbolic gesture, at least in my mind, of acknowledgement and thanks, albeit in a very small and inadequate way, of what Bruce Springsteen has meant in my life.  

Kevin reported on the final total of donations and included a copy of his letter to the Administrator of KACF with the list of eighty-four contributors. The final tally on the KACF Fund drive was $1,930.46.  

Dave Marsh replied with heartfelt thanks:
I very much appreciate the donation from fellow Digesters. Actually, I’m not doing so good finding words to express my gratitude. Please know that the money will do a lot of people—especially kids—a lot of good, as well as brightening the holidays, an unpleasant time of year for us because that’s when we lost Kristen. . . . I’m just knocked out—the amount of money is impressive (more-so to those of us who do this work regularly, perhaps) especially in a world where test tubes can cost $6 or $8 apiece; the amount of dedication it represents is even more of a boon.23

Kristen’s mother, Barbara Carr, added her thanks a few weeks later. Dave Marsh thought the donation set a precedent for online community contributions:

A while back, there was some discussion about “disappointment” that the KAC donation reached “only” a certain figure. So I wanted to tell you personally what the “impact” of this gift has been at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute. To the best of their knowledge, no other private foundation has ever received an Internet donation of this (or any) kind. They went into a complete dizzy at the concept; they’re going on-line, they’re trying to figure out what this means, they think Kevin Kinder is the fund-raising genius of the 21st Century.24

Kevin noted that the Neil Young listserv and U2 listservs have also been raising money for charity. “Certainly what we did wasn’t a new idea, there have been larger fundraisers on the Neil Young lists (for the Bridge) and the U2 list, and probably numerous others. . . .”25 And other online groups, such as the Debbie Gibson mailing list, have raised money for charitable causes.26 But this was the first fundraiser on a Bruce Springsteen-related listserv. Not only does the charity benefit from the money, but the friendships developed online form equally lasting bonds. Bill Alicandro wrote:

You may remember that about 30 of us Prodigy/GEaie/AOL circle of Sprazzers made a substantial donation to the Kidney Foundation, in memory of Chet Kresia’s mom, who passed away last year due to kidney complications.

I’ll never forget Chet’s reaction and amazement when he received the donation. This medium often tends to mask the personal aspect of socializing, since we rarely see, hear or touch one another in person . . . but a bond is a bond, and I never thought I’d thank Bruce for anything more than the music that stirs my soul. But thanks, Bruce, for introducing me to those who I consider to be my very best of friends.. . .”27

Chris McCormick, ever the idea man, urged the online community to donate items for auction, something that would become a regular fund-raising effort on LuckyTown:

Maybe the next time?? we do something like this we could get some of the record industry types with deep pockets to match our donations or contribute stuff to sell at an electronic auction or something . . . don’t worry Kevin, this time we’ll get volunteers for everything. It was a nice response from Barbara Carr and Dave Marsh, put the spirit in xmas for me. Everyone who donated turned a what if into reality that will help those who need it most.28

The news media picked up on the donation and reported it in the Washington Post in February 1995.29 The 1994 fundraiser was not a one-time event. Kevin started a tradition of calling for annual charitable giving to the KACF in 1995: “This is our second annual group charitable effort; last year we raised a little over $1900, and I have high hopes that
with a much larger subscription base and a little more help from our friends, that we can
do better this year.39

Chris McCormick decided to broaden the net and encourage Luckytowners to in-
volve their employers in contributing to the KACF:

My company is in the electrical business, so we have sent out a fund raising
form letter to our vendors and even some select customers. Many of you may
be in a position to do something similar... so DO IT! I’ve also contacted Coca
Cola, TBS, Blockbuster and the local rock stations here.31

The second year, LTD collected $6,625 from 155 people. Kevin noted in his email to the
listserv:

As usual, numerous people included notes with their donations. I quote a
few without attribution below:

"Not only do we love Bruce for his talent, but for his great humanitarian-
ism, which hopefully rubs off on us, his fans."

"It’s good to have this way of channeling excess Bruce fervor into some-
thing so positive."

The latter quote touches on my personal feelings: in addition to giving me
personally a warm and fuzzy feeling in the holiday season by helping out a
good cause, the fundraiser really does show that LuckyTown, though its sub-
scribers, can be a force for accomplishing a positive good, beyond just provid-
ing a forum for fans. It helps make it all worthwhile.32

Adding some incentives to the 1996 KACF fundraiser, Springsteen front row concert
tickets in Wallingford, Connecticut, donated by Rich and Mary-Ellen Breton, were the
prize for the person who donated the most money. Lowell Kern, one of the organizers,
announced that The Kristen Ann Carr Fund is the unofficial charity of the Luckytown
Digest.33 With tickets to Springsteen concerts as the lure, LTDers increased the frequency
of auctions to raise money for KACF.

On the heels of our wildly successful auction of two pairs of tickets to
Bruce’s September 18 show in Wallingford, CT, in which $9,200 was raised
for the Kristen Ann Carr Fund, which followed our auction of a pair of seats to
a show at the Beacon Theater last December which raised $807, we present the
third Kristen Ann Carr Fund Ticket Auction.34

The response to our auctions of Springsteen tickets to benefit the Kristen
Ann Carr Fund has been overwhelming. Your words of support and encour-
agement, as well as the donations of additional tickets, have given us the drive
to keep this grass roots fundraising effort going. Through the overwhelming
generosity of Springsteen fans, we have raised over $10,500 to fight cancer in
the past 10 months through these auctions. And now we’re looking to push that
total even higher with the Fourth KAC Fund Ticket Auction.35

While LTDers were auctioning tickets for Springsteen concerts, Kevin continued his
annual fundraising effort for KACF. “This is our third annual group charitable effort; last
year we raised a little over $6600, and I have high hopes that with a larger subscription
base and a little more help from our friends that we can do better this year.”36 Chris
McCormick increased his corporate fundraising efforts, soliciting “corporate donations
from 65 vendors and 34 customers my company does business with. In addition to these
companies I request contributions from companies that may or may not have a “Bruce”
connection.”37 Ticket auctions multiplied by the number of concerts on Bruce’s schedule:
First, we are pleased to report that the two high bidders for the auction for tix to the Lowell, MA shows were upgraded to the front row by the man in black, who was waiting for them when they arrived at the venue. And second, we are even more pleased to report that the current total raised for the Kristin Ann Carr Fund through these ticket auctions is $12,500.

This time, we have three sets of tickets, all for the last week of the tour, and all donated by LTD subscribers.

Even if you don’t want to bid on these tickets, we urge you to support the LuckyTown Digest’s Annual Holiday Drive to support the KAC Fund.

The online auction fundraisers continued into 2001, with a special Web site set up, www.brucetlegs.com, advertising: "The Summer 2001 Online Springsteen Community Auction to benefit the Kristen Ann Carr Fund of the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center."

Inspired by the generosity and creativity of fundraising by the LTDers, auctions for Springsteen concert tickets to benefit other charities soon followed.

Through the graciousness of Bruce Springsteen and Jon Landau Management, a wonderful donation has been made to the MACC Fund (Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer). The MACC Fund is a charitable organization that supports research for the purposes of discovering effective treatments and cures for childhood cancer. The primary beneficiary of MACC Fund support is the Midwest Children’s Cancer Center with research conducted in the MACC Fund Research Center of the Medical College of Wisconsin. The MACC Fund also supports research at the Wisconsin Clinical Cancer Center in Madison. These are world class research centers.

Now while the Kristen Ann Carr fund is the unofficial “official” charity of the LuckyTown Digest, the MACC Fund is virtually a sister charity. We’ll be doing some unique things on the annual KAC Fund drive on LTD this year that have some roots in the MACC Fund. Suffice to say that through the efforts of the MACC Fund and similar organizations the hope is to have all the Kristen Ann Carr’s of the world grow up to be healthy adults. The MACC Fund has a theme, “A good time for a good cause.”

Certainly Bruce’s October 2 concert in Milwaukee aptly fits that phrase.

Jon Landau Management has donated a pair of “primo” (their verbage, not mine) seats for Bruce’s performance in Milwaukee. Exact ticket location is not and will not be available in advance. The ducats will go to the person making the largest donation to the MACC Fund through this auction.

For historical purposes, a pair of first balcony seats for Bruce’s 12/13/95 show at the Beacon Theatre sold for $807. Four tickets for the 9/18/96 Wallingford show went for $9200 (gasp!).

The MACC Fund auction astounded organizers with spirited bidding and a generous donation:

The auction of “primo” seats for Bruce Springsteen’s October 2 show at the Riverside Theatre in Milwaukee raised a grand total of $11,900.

The MACC Fund (Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer), directly received $10,400 through three auctions. First, a pair of tickets were made available through the LTD Digest. The winning individual, who wishes to re-
main anonymous, presented a top bid of $2,000 and then graciously donated another $1,000 for a total of $3,000.

Four other pairs were split between two Milwaukee radio stations for live on-air auctions. Those pairs were had for $1,500, $1,700 twice by the same individual who “doubled down,” and $2,500. In addition, the person bidding $1,500 also donated $1,500 to the CAP (Child Abuse Prevention) Fund which is also based in Milwaukee and has its roots in the Milwaukee Brewers Association.

I’d like to thank Bruce and the folks at Jon Landau Management for donating these tickets. It was surrealistic to hear the spirited bidding spiral upwards as it did. In addition, one L’TDer has offered to build a web site for the MACC Fund. Those types of in-kind donations are invaluable to an organization such as this. Also, it’s not simply a matter of the dollars raised, it’s the positive notoriety that is received through mentions in the media and a loose association with Bruce Springsteen and his organization.

It’s all very much appreciated.

Thanks too to Lowell for his organizational tips and Dave for his words of encouragement and support. Not that plans weren’t already in the works, but the KAC Fund will receive support in spades. Additional charitable work was picked up by Luckytowners:

A grand total of 10 people bid on the fourth row Springsteen ticket for Tuesday night’s Asbury Park show I posted about last Thursday afternoon (Digest No. 245). The winning bidder, who will remain anonymous (because I forgot to ask him if he wants his name publicized), came in with a bid of $375.

If you wish to make donation to the charity that benefitted from the auction, the National Neurofibromatosis Foundation, Inc., you can send a check to.

P.S. Any donation you can make will be appreciated. I’m not doing this to intentionally cut into the KAC Fund Drive, because one can contribute to both worthy causes. I for one will be sending a check off to Kevin in the next week or two for the KAC.

Individual ticket sales and spot donations caught on as a way of supporting local charities at Bruce’s concerts:

I will be driving down from Cleveland for the show, and have an extra ticket for sale. It’s not great, Sec 4 Row 15 Seat 9 or 10. I would like the price to consist of two things: directions to the hall from I-718 (!) and a face-value ($35) donation to whichever hunger or social service group is in the lobby.

The results from the third LuckyTown fundraiser for the KACF were disappointing:

While I philosophically try to keep my expectations in check and roll with what reality hands me, I found the overall results, well, depressing. This was the third year of the fundraiser, and despite a larger audience, the funds raised were down 24% from last year, and the total number of donors was down 47%. I’m not saying this to be critical of anyone, since we all have our own favorite causes and financial constraints, and it’s a personal decision. But if anyone could shed any light on what might have gone wrong with the fundraiser or what we could do differently for next year to improve, I’d be curious to hear
from you. The 47% drop seems pretty significant, and my nearest guesses are just guesses at this point.

Thank you to all of you who participated in this year’s fundraiser, or the various ticket and other auctions that raised funds throughout last year. If you’re wondering about the Hall of Fame basketball, we received no minimum bid for it, but Bill King is still looking at other creative options that might provide a happy ending for the basketball. Thanks again also to Chris McCormick, who not only continues to raise significant funds by shaming down his suppliers :-), but came up with the original idea three years ago for Luckytown to do this charity fundraiser...44

In the letter to the KACF Administrator, Kevin noted he was enclosing

a bundle of checks and cash totaling $4,116.00 in contributions for the
Kristen Ann Carr Fund, as a group donation from the subscribers of the Lucky-
Town mailing list on the Internet.

As you may remember, our 1995 KACF Fund drive raised $5450.00, so un-
fortunately this is a bit of a down year for us. The 83 contributors are listed on
the next page. On the bright side though, separate ticket auctions organized by
LuckyTown subscribers raised over $12,000 for the KAC Fund in 1996.45

The fourth LTD fundraiser for KACF started with Chris McCormick’s plea for cor-
porate contacts for donations.46 A combination of personal issues prevented Kevin from
organizing the fourth KACF fundraiser until 1998.46 Branching off into collateral fund-
raising for the KACF in partnership with another charity, Bill King donated the basket-
ball package to CentraState Health Care Foundation in Freehold to auction and split the
proceeds between the two charities.48

In addition to donations and ticket auctions to benefit KACF, some LTDers decided
to become involved in their local grassroots organizations:

I like the fact that making my donation through the LuckyTown fundraiser
makes a statement to the outside world about what kind of influence Bruce
Springsteen has on his fans, and hopefully makes Bruce himself aware that his
dereper messages are being heard and acted upon.

Another way I choose to honor Bruce is following his example in fighting
hunger. Bruce has made donations to local food banks in cities where he has
played since 1980, and has urged his audiences to support local agencies and
contribute to food drives. His compassion for the less fortunate has long been
an undercurrent in much of his work, but with the release of The Ghost of Tom
Joad, this concern has become much more overt—it is impossible to listen to
this album without feeling empathy for those who have lost touch with their
communities and slipped through the cracks of society.

T G O T J made such a strong impression on me that I finally took an action I
had long intended to take but just kept putting off. I began donating my time to
a local organization, Gainesville Harvest, that “rescues” fresh food from restaur-
ants and other institutions that is otherwise just thrown away and delivers it the
same day to agencies that feed the hungry. What is interesting is that I seem to
have gotten much more out of this experience than I have contributed, not least
of which is the pleasure I felt at learning that Bruce works with a harvest or-
ganization in his own hometown!49
Food Banks and World Hunger Year

Continuing his work since 1984 with community food banks, Bruce initially announced his dollar contribution and asked the audience to support the local organization. Onstage in Philadelphia in 1992, radio disc jockey and long-time Springsteen supporter, the late Ed Sciake, presented a $10,000 check from Bruce to the Greater Philadelphia Food Bank. In Pittsburgh, Bruce asks the audience to support the Rainbow Kitchen but doesn’t mention his own $10,000 donation. In 1996, during the Ghost of Tom Joad Tour, Bruce invited the local food banks to set up tables in the theater lobby and donated the t-shirts sales proceeds to them:

The local Foodbank [in Youngstown, Ohio] was the beneficiary of the proceeds of the t-shirt sales. The promoters had contacted the Foodbank on the Wednesday before the concert to let them know about the donation and also to give them several tickets and backstage passes. The Cleveland Food Bank had a booth set up, taking donations and passing out key chains, and again Bruce (before THL) made a t-shirt pitch saying souvenir proceeds go to the foodbank.

On the Devils & Dust tour in 2005, Bruce continued to support local food banks and urged audience members to do likewise, with statements at all venues similar to this one:

Got our friends here tonight from the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. Been working with them for a long time. They’ve been here in New Jersey twenty years plus, fighting hunger and poverty, providing food and assistance, education, and training for the struggling citizens of New Jersey. On your way out, please, they need your ongoing support.

Mary-Ellen Breton, in response to Bruce’s involvement in the late Harry Chapin’s World Hunger Year (WHY), proposed to LTDers that they contribute to an auction to benefit WHY. With support from Kevin Kinder, Mary-Ellen auctioned seventy Bruce-related items to benefit WHY. Mary-Ellen announced the first “on-line Grassroots Springsteen Community / World Hunger Year / Hungerthon Charity Auction!” on November 10, 1997. One of the items donated by LTDers was Greetings From Luckytown Volume 2, a limited-edition CD compilation of Bruce’s songs recorded by worldwide subscribers to LTD, among them the author and her husband. Before the auction closed, two additional items were added for sale. This was another successful auction, raising over $4,600 for WHY. Mary-Ellen added in her email with the auction results:

We had so much fun with this (despite the time involved) that we will be holding another auction in Spring to benefit another Springsteen-related charity. If you would like to donate an item drop me an email. Next November we will repeat the World Hunger Year/Hungerthon auction too!

Springsteen has long been a supporter of the organization, which was co-founded in 1975 by late singer-songwriter Harry Chapin and Bill Ayres, a radio talk show host who is now WHY’s executive director. Bruce donated all of the proceeds from the Devils & Dust tour rehearsal show on April 21, 2005, in Asbury Park to World Hunger Year. WHY’s Web site lists all the local food banks and soup kitchens designated to receive funds from that tour.

In 2003, Mary-Ellen was still raising money for good causes. She put out a call on the DAT-heads listerv for contributions in memory of John Dean Tsalikes, a saxophonist
and music collector/trader, who died in Florida on Oct. 10, 2003, and within days the Springsteen fans organized a charitable cause in his name:

In tribute to John's spirit, and in honor of his memory and his love for Bruce's music, the RMAS [Record Music Artists; Springsteen newsgroup]) (and extended) community is organizing a donation effort for two of Bruce's favorite charities. The beneficiaries of this effort will be the Kristen Ann Carr Fund (KACF) and the Light of Day Foundation. Our hope is that Springsteen fans everywhere will jump in to this collaborative effort to honor John Tsalikes. All donations will be split 50-50 between the KACF and the LOD Foundation unless you specify otherwise.60

A subsequent message on the JTMF Web page noted, "As of 10/30/03, this memorial charity effort has closed, raising over $5,000, with over ninety donors participating.61

The interplay up until now between Bruce and his online fans had been monodirectional. By all accounts, Bruce did not read LuckyTown Digest but fans presumed that because Dave Marah was a member and he had close ties through his wife to Bruce, that some of the discussions filtered down to Bruce. The historic preservationist project to save Palace Amusements in Asbury Park reached worldwide coverage through the Internet. One thread of local activism that Bruce espoused from the stage soon became the inspiration for far-flung fans to coalesce around a cause to save a physical artifact memorialized in the songs of Bruce Springsteen.

Save Tillie

In an unusual turnaround, Bruce ended up supporting a fan-organized effort to save the face of "Tillies" (a caricature of George Tilyou, a Coney Island amusement park entrepreneur) on the façade of Palace Amusements in Asbury Park. The Save Tillie Foundation, started by fans on the LuckyTown listserv and eventually numbering more than 1,000 members including amusement park devotees and historic preservationists, succeeded in saving two partial façades in June 2004—local activism at its best started and orchestrated by out-of-state fans. Bruce supported the Save Tillie Foundation with publicity and cash, including "some of the proceeds from the Springsteen/Max Weinberg 7 Army Park Convention Hall Christmas concerts."62

Founded in July 1998, the Save Tillie Foundation's original goal of saving the Palace's iconic Tillie image expanded in 1999 to an attempt to save the entire Palace. Under the group's leadership, the Palace won an honored place on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Demolition of the Palace in June 2004 came over the objections of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Asbury Park Historical Society, Preservation New Jersey, and Save Tillie. In the end, they saved more than 125 internal artifacts from the Palace and the Tillie mural from the Cookman Avenue wall, and through their work the Bumper Car murals on the Lake Avenue façade were also removed to storage.63 The redevelopment company is required to incorporate the murals into the new building on the site of Palace Amusements.

The bulk of the work, spearheaded by Marylander Bob Crane, took place off the LuckyTown Digest as the Save Tillie Foundation developed its own identity. Crane posted updates to their progress on LuckyTown but the organization no longer confined itself to this online community. While Save Tillie was born on LuckyTown, it quickly
grew and matured as a viable, independent entity—a fitting testament to "the majesty, the mystery, and the ministry of rock and roll."^{66}

A Change Is Gonna Come

With the demise of *LuckyTown Digest* in February 2003, the core community dispersed to other Springsteen discussion listservs that sprang up online, such as Bruce's Place on Yahoo Groups.^{57} Some LTDErs such as John Hocking joined Bruce's Place but the camaraderie among the members for charity auctions and fundraising for KACF diminished. Notices on Bruce's Place in 2003 through 2005 announced that the Kristen Ann Carr Fund itself would auction Bruce-related items on eBay, and reminded group members of their annual fundraising dinner.^{68} In addition to individual members of Bruce's Place contributing to the KACF, a representative from the Fund introduced the cause to the listserv and promoted online eBay auctions with messages to Bruce's Place to entice Bruce fans to bid with all proceeds to benefit the Fund.^{69} Responses included a request for more information with a Web page link to the annual fundraiser, and a note that he "linked this cause a few times in my blog and will pitch the word whenever I can."^{70} Bruce's Place listserv moderators allowed a broad range of discussion and often the postings devolved into political rants, totally off the topic of anything directly related to Bruce Springsteen. The political discourse afforded members from all political persuasions to voice their displeasure with—and support of—Bruce's "coming out" in favor of John Kerry for president in 2004. Before this election, Bruce supported causes no candidates.

Vote for Change

The unwavering support that Bruce had received from his fans for his various charitable activities soon faltered when his public relations firm announced that he and the E Street Band would participate in partisan politics:

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band will perform a single New Jersey concert for Vote For Change on Wednesday, October 13 [2004]. The concert will feature Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band, Jackson Browne, John Fogerty and Patti Scialfa. The concert is being produced by MoveOn/PAC to benefit America Coming Together. The Vote For Change tour kicked off in Pennsylvania on October 1, and will include twelve states with the addition of the New Jersey show. Vote For Change artists were brought together by a single idea—the need to make a change in the direction of our country at the federal, state and local levels.^{71}

On the tour Bruce spoke to the audience, explained the purpose of the tour, and the need to "fight for a government that is open, forward-looking, rational and humane."^{72} Even amidst the well meaning concert-goers who were there to support the cause, others viewed it as one more chance to see Bruce. In Cleveland, Jimmy Guterman heard one fan say, "I don't give a shit about all that, I just wanna hear 'Rosalita.'"^{73} In addition to co-organizing the Vote For Change Tour, Bruce also actively campaigned for John Kerry for president in the waning months before the 2004 election. Springsteen joined Kerry at campaign rallies in Madison, Wisconsin, and Columbus, Ohio, on October 28, and an
election-eve rally in Cleveland, Ohio, on November 1. Bruce spoke on behalf of the
Kerry-Edwards campaign at the stops and performed some songs.74

In an interview in the Detroit Free Press, some fans who attended one of the Michi-
gan shows were a mixed political group.

They said they had agreed to not talk politics for the day. “It’s all about Bruce,”
one chimed in. Maura Brennan said she had seen Springsteen six times, but
would have gone if the concert was benefiting Bush. The pro-Bush mem-
bers of the group said they were not too conflicted about purchasing tickets for
shows designed to hurt their candidate.75

At the other extreme, Phil Kutz, in the Wall Street Journal, October 5, 2004, wrote
about his friend emailing him, “I never thought I’d see the day that I would trash my
Bruce collection.”76

More Libertarian than Republican, Mr. [Chet] Karnas was floored when
Mr. Springsteen joined a “Vote for Change” tour of rockers backing Sen. John
Kerry, aligning themselves with what my pal sees as the left’s blind hatred of
President Bush. “It has had a profound effect on my views of my former
‘heroes,’” Mr. Karnas wrote. “Can’t they just play music without alienating
their fan base?” . . . Springsteen’s partisanship, he said, “will take a little bit of
the joy away, and that hurts.”

The message board on his official Web site, brucesspringsteen.net, now is
peppered with angry missives from self-described former fans. Perhaps the
negative reaction illustrates how far rock and its fans have strayed from the we-
can-change-the-world roots of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan and others.76

Bruce told the Cleveland Plain Dealer that he “met some Republican fans who just said
they stayed away from those shows or they didn’t agree.”77 In an interview with CBS
News, May 22, 2005, Bruce commented that not everybody was happy with his perfor-
ance, “I got a lot of nasty letters during the last election” including a box of smashed
records.78

The fans on Bruce’s Place were particularly vociferous and polarized. Not many
agreed with William P. Howley, Jr. when he wrote:

I feel that you don’t need to agree with everything Bruce says or does to be a
fan. I love his music, but do not necessarily agree with his politics all the time.
Some people may take the ‘all or nothing’ view, but I don’t.79

“John in the Heart of VA” responded to the Vote For Change Tour announcement, ada-
manently:

I already know how I feel about the War in Iraq and I already know who I’m
voting for in November. As a veteran fan of 30 years, I will not pay $ to see
Bruce as part of any event related to politics. I have never gone to a Springsteen
concert other than to enjoy myself. If I want politics, I’ll tune to CNN.80

Roy Opopchinski perceptively commented:

To those of you who said that they don’t believe that Bruce Springsteen
should be playing the vote for change shows because of the political slant
involved, I ask the following question. Would you react the same way if he
were playing for Republican causes? Do you not support the many musicians
(including Britney Spears) who have been outspoken in their support for
(your President? Hypocrisy sure is easy when your party isn’t being supported. 41

Richard Whiting analyzed why he believed Bruce finally acted politically:

Perhaps Bruce sees that this is an important election, maybe more important than any election since Nixon was in office. And perhaps Bruce has taken a look around the world, seen the attitude of many diverse people and cultures toward the USA and has said to himself that this election counts. And as a citizen perhaps he needs to get involved and do whatever he can. Perhaps it is a more mature Bruce, who sees his place in this world and knows that maybe he can make a change happen.

Bruce’s music is political. Those of you who don’t want to believe that need to take a step back and understand the themes he has been writing and singing about, especially since “Born to Run” (a political song). And whether it is losing the job in the song “The River,” or the very political song of “Born in the USA” or “Youngstown” or countless others, he writes about political things. But those political things are within the context of everyday living. The problem with many of us Americans is that we try and separate politics from everyday living. And that is impossible. Everything from what you watch on TV to the billboards on the side of the road to the choice of what doctor you see to the price of gas to the cost of living, it is all political. Every single aspect of your life is political and to deny that is doing nothing more than staying uninformed and letting life happen to you rather than make life happen for you. And just perhaps Bruce understands this. And perhaps he wants to make life happen, and perhaps it is this desire to make this happen that may drive him to do this tour.

As for me, I will watch Bruce in any context I can. But I do that because I have always had a sense that I share the same ideals as he does, even when his ability to share those ideals were mostly done in song as opposed to his early interviews or actions. If Bruce suddenly became conservative and went the way of Dennis Miller for example, then no I wouldn’t see Bruce in the same light. His music would have lose [sic] its hold on me. Everything is political, even the music you listen to has that context. So bring on the concert. Bring it on because this election does indeed count. 42

John Hocking eloquently questioned the Bruce’s Place subscribers who chose to quit the list in protest of Bruce’s political stance:

I feel genuinely sorry for my fellow Tramps who are stepping off this Train because Bruce is not in agreement with what the Deserter [George W. Bush] has done over the last 45 months. You must be perplexed. Why would he turn on a man who has given him tens of millions of dollars in lowered taxes? But heck, why has he been quietly writing checks and publicly plugging food banks for 20 years. . 43

I’m guessing that most everyone who announces they are leaving is a right winger who hates to read anything that doesn’t support their views. 44

Erik Johnson took a very personal approach to Bruce’s songs and the context for their performance in his refusal to attend the Vote for Change concerts:

What will be most disappointing to me if Bruce does this is NOT the politics, but the shoehorning of his songs into a specific context, both historical and
ideological. I've read virtually every interview Bruce has given in the last 20 years; it was always my distinct impression he wanted to create lyrics that were just open enough for his listeners to find some personal meaning—some "space" in the songs that resonated in them, without having to tell us exactly what he wanted us to feel. Seeing those songs ripped out of my context and put into a specific context would be tough, very tough for me. Hence, I won't be going to any shows if they're nearby...I need my Bruce songs more than I need my Bruce shows.\(^5\)

Scott Peterson questioned Erik Johnson’s ability to separate Bruce’s songs from any performance whether it be Vote For Change, Amnesty International, Vietnam Veterans, or to save Asbury Park’s boardwalk, and the political connotations surrounding the event, using “Born in the USA” as an example of contextualized meaning not only pertaining to the event but in juxtaposition to other songs.\(^6\)

Erik responded the next day with an explanation of his beliefs about Bruce and partisan politics:

> Maybe it's me; I've always thought of Bruce as above politics. Not above the issues of the day, but above politics. I just hate the idea of Bruce being so explicitly attached to a party or a candidate who will inevitably misuse his lyrics and ideas.

> See, the thing is, if Bruce gets attached—by his own volition or not—to a particular candidate or party, in this polarized age, it will inevitably lock out people from hearing what the man has to say. Not saying it's right or wrong, just saying, if someone thinks of Bruce as a Kerry man, and he's a Bush voter, he might not listen to the songs and be affected the way he would be otherwise. MORE people should not just listen to Bruce, but "get" him—it's just that they have to listen first, and fewer people will if he get[s] too tied up in politics.\(^7\)

The discussion continued into November. It became clear that neither side could convince the other if Bruce should or should not take a political stand by aligning with the Democratic Party. But most seemed to agree that as far as Bruce’s songs go, they stand on their own as testaments to his beliefs.

**Conclusion**

Bruce Springsteen and his fans have an interconnectedness that transcends the typical relationship between a performer and audience. Bruce has expressed his commitment to his audience in terms similar to his lyrics “faith will be rewarded.” The fans, in response, respect his music and integrity. Bruce’s faith in his fans was tested when he took his politics into the partisan arena during the 2004 presidential election. Willing to accept or ignore (depending on whether they are “word” people or “music” people) the messages couched in the lyrics, the fans on the LuckyTown listserv absorbed the principles espoused by Bruce Springsteen and adopted the Kristen Ann Carr Fund as their unofficial “official” charity. As long as his causes had no partisan political overtones, they might embrace, tolerate, or ignore them. When the idealism turned to political reality, some fans could not accept Bruce’s activism. As a reflection of America's split into hardline “red” and “blue” states, Springsteen's online fan base on Bruce's Place drew their lines in the
sand and personalized their relationship with him—some people could not separate their
distaste for his support of John Kerry with their love of his music.

An artist of the stature of Bruce Springsteen takes a risk when aligning with an un-
popular or controversial cause. Seals and Crofts's career noseived into oblivion when
they released their anti-abortion album, Unborn Child. Bruce Springsteen's old Back-
street fan magazine: "I think if you followed us over the past thirty years, our positions
on moral social issues have been consistent and straightforward. . . . The show is a forum
of ideas. That's one of the things that we try to provide over the course of the evening.
And as such, that's part of what you're getting when you walk through the doors."³³

Notes

¹Charles R. Cross and the editors of Backstreets Magazine, Backstreets: Spring-
Dave Marsh, Born to Run; the Bruce Springsteen Story. New York: Dell, 198, pp. 238-
242.
²Cross, Backstreets: Springsteen: The Man and His Music, p. 188.
³Marsh, Glory Days, p. 260.
⁴Marsh, Glory Days, p. 263.
⁵Gary Graff, ed., The Ties that Bind: Bruce Springsteen A to Z. Detroit: Visible
⁶Bruce Springsteen, the Rolling Stone File: The Ultimate Compendium of Inter-
views, Articles, Facts, and Opinions from the Files of Rolling Stone, p. 189.
⁷Bruce Springsteen remarks onstage at Peterson Events Center, Pittsburgh,
⁸Dave Marsh, Sun City by Artists United Against Apartheid, the Struggle for Free-
⁹Eric Alterman, It Ain't No Sin to Be Glad You're Alive; The Promise of Bruce
¹⁰Alterman, It Ain't No Sin, p. 242.
¹¹Kevin Kinder began the Backstreets discussion listerv in 1992, changed it to a
Digest with No. 10, March 26, 1992, then changed the name to Luckytown on September
14, 1994; it ceased Feb. 19, 2003. The archives only go through Vol. 5, No. 1; February
20 [i.e., 27], 1998 on ftp.cs.tu-berlin.de/pub/doc/music/artists/s/bruce_springsteen/mail-
list/.
¹³Alterman, It Ain't No Sin, p. 241.
¹⁴bosq@granjon.att.com, 30 June 1993, Backstreets Digest listserv, accessed August
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¹⁵Luckyman 17102.1677@compuserve.com, 5 Oct. 1994, Luckytown Digest, ac-
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18h.blaisure@genie.geis.com, 10 Oct. 1994, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
22kvk@ixist.att.com, 29 Nov. 1994, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
34KACT1X2@aol.com, 8 Oct. 1996, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
38KACT1X2@aol.com, 29 Nov. 1996, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
42ESTHKEs@aol.com [Joe Lewin], 25 Nov. 1996, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
43kmcm4@po.cwnru.edu (Kathleen M. Corcoran DVM JD), 27 Nov. 1996, LuckyTown Digest, accessed August 31, 2005.
51Suzy Shaw SUZSHAW@nervm.nrrdc.ufl.edu, 12 Dec. 1996, LuckyTown Digest, accessed September 1, 2005.
53Cross, "Can You Testify?," p. 23.
58luckytown-request@netcom.com (Kevin Kinder), 10 Nov. 1997, LuckyTown Digest, accessed September 1, 2005.
59rbp@richbreton.nv.com (Mary-Ellen Breton), 10 Nov. 1997, LuckyTown Digest, accessed September 1, 2005.
60Greetings From LuckyTown Vol. 1 was put on cassette tape; Volume 2 was put on CD-R. Only 16 numbered copies of these CDs exist: number 1 was sent to Bruce, number 2 to Kevin Kinder, maintainer of the LTD and all other 14 copies were sent out to the 14 participants. Others interested only could get these recordings through a non-commercial tape tree. The studio engineer made this extra copy just for the WHY auction.
61"Breton-Mary Ellen" MSMAIL.BRETONM1@TSOD.LMIG.COM, 1 Dec. 1997, LuckyTown Digest, accessed September 1, 2005.
63World Hunger Year Web site http://www.worldhungeryear.org, accessed August 31, 2005. The organizations that will benefit from his participation in WHY'S A AHP program include Capuchin Soup Kitchen (Detroit), North Texas Food Bank (Dallas), The Bridge (Phoenix), Los Angeles Regional Food Bank, People Assisting the Homeless (Los Angeles), People's Grocery (Oakland, Calif.), Food Bank of the Rockies (Denver), Second Harvest Heartland (St. Paul, Minn.), Greater Chicago Food Depository, DC Central Kitchen, Cleveland Food Bank, Greater Philadelphia Food Bank, Community Food Bank of NJ, and The Greater Boston Food Bank.
64. Graff, The Ties that Bind, pp. 323-324.
66. This is part of Bruce Springsteen’s rap during the song, “Light of Day,” on the 1999 reunion tour, August 12, 1999.
67. Bruce’s Place Digest continues the tradition of The LuckyToun Digest, which for many years served as the premiere central retrieval site for all things “Springsteen” scattered across the Internet. It is a forum to debate, discuss, and share our own personal connections to Bruce’s music. This is a moderated list. “Bruce’s Place” is an unofficial, fan-ran operation, and has no official relationship with Bruce Springsteen or Columbia Records. Paul K., Owner/Co-Moderator; David Vaughn, Dominick F. Mann, Scott Peterson, Roy Ophofinski co-moderators. Founded on February 20, 2003, there were 1,469 members as of September 3, 2005.
68. "Kristen Ann Carr Fund" search on Bruce’s Place archives, July 19, 2005.
75. Steve Byrne, "Vote For Change Tour: Concerts are pro-Kerry, but many go only for the music," reprinted by Barry Kaplovitz on Bruce’s Place, October 6, 2005, accessed October 6, 2005.
77. John Seeder, "Springsteen’s Solo Tour Gives ‘Devils' Its Due," Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 15, 2005, quoted in email from Barry Kaplovitz bkaplovitz@earthlink.net, 21 May 2005, Bruce’s Place Digest Number 794, 22 May 2005 [brucesplace@yahoo.com], accessed May 23, 2005.
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Byrne, Steve. "Vote For Change Tour: Concerts are pro-Kerry, but many go only for the music." Reprinted by Barry Kaplovitz on Bruce's Place, October 6, 2005, accessed September 4, 2005.


*Greetings from Luckytown II: The Wired, the Internet & The E-mail Shuffle CD*, 1997.


John Taulikes Memorial Fund Web page, August 30, 2005.


Soeder, John. “Springsteen’s Solo Tour Gives ‘Devils’ Its Due.” Cleveland Plain Dealer, May 15, 2005. Quoted in email from Barry Kaplovitz bkaplovitz@earthlink.net, May 21, 2005,
