

Written by Allan Besselink
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I had never really planned on walking away from the guitar, not that I ever did so completely anyway. With that said, getting back on stage, guitar in hand, really wasn't on my radar for the immediate future.

That was until my friend [Tad Hillin](#) mentioned that he would be playing a gig at Strange Brew in Austin on August 31. As it was also his birthday, he was planning on having an open jam after the gig with fellow musician friends. About 6 weeks out from the gig, he suggested I bring my guitar and play.

Six weeks away. Minimal callouses on my fingers. Dexterity a little rusty. And the guitar chops faded from a time that seemed like eons ago.

Of course I would.

I'd played many a venue and open mic in the early to mid-'90s. But as we all know, our lives - and focus - evolves over time. Timing is everything. Lo and behold, almost two decades had passed with nary a guitar chord played anywhere but the confines of my own home if that. No worries though. Creativity has an organic existence of its own. There comes a time when it is time to create, and I knew in my heart of hearts that the timing would be correct again, sooner or later.

Fast forward to July. The idea of playing live sounded fine and good. That was until the moment of clarity hit: callouses on my fingers that were barely in existence, and what felt like

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minimal fluency in a language I had once spoken so well. It was time to practice. Back in the day I would play until my fingers were raw. Fortunately I have gained some degree of sanity in my older years. Patience would be required.

The night of August 31 arrived. It soon came time to jam. Just throw the guitar over the shoulder, plug in, throw caution to the wind, and, well, just see what happens - right?

I have spoken at conferences of 500 or more participants. I have played guitar on stage in front of a couple hundred people. None of that has ever fazed me. I rarely get anxious performing in front of a group of people. Until the night of August 31. A least for a few moments.

But as the song says, "only for a moment and the moment's gone". The initial trepidation soon eased. The notes started flowing, the rhythm started grooving, and suddenly I found myself, head down, doing something I'd not done in the better part of a couple of decades.

There is a special place that I could always go to when I played live, a happy place where I would be fully immersed in the notes and chords and rhythms. **Call it "the zone" if you will.** On that night in August, I had fleeting glimpses of it once again. There were moments when my mind would fly back to the early '90s, times when I would play at an open mic or sit in with my friends Third Degree. It was that happy place again, a place where my fingers would know where to go, my slide would weave notes around the chords, my solos were singing, my grooves were tight.

Ah yes, I remember it oh so well.

And then I would unceremoniously fall out of the zone when my lack of chops would emerge. To be expected, no doubt.

I was reminded of how special an experience it is to express, to improvise, to create, to share with the public. I remembered what that felt like, albeit a feeling that was a little faded with the passage of time. It was special nonetheless.

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The world of live music welcomed me back with open arms. Don't worry, it won't be another 20 years before you see me on stage again. Promise.

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