

**Song Exploder**  
**U2 - Cedarwood Road**  
**Episode 42**

Hrishikesh: You're listening to Song Exploder, where musicians take apart their songs and piece by piece tell the story of how they were made. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

Bono: With U2, sometimes I write lyrics, and then we try to find the music to express those lyrics. But most of the time, it's about

*("Cedarwood Road" by U2)*

Bono: finding a feeling first, and then trying to express that feeling. So Edge had this big blues riff, powerful and full of rage. It was a natural fit for me to talk about my own rage.

*("Cedarwood Road" by U2)*

Hrishikesh: That was Bono, lead singer of U2, talking about the song, "Cedarwood Road." It's named after the street where he grew up in Dublin. He'll talk more about how he channeled his memories to write the lyrics for this song. But first, we'll hear from the song's co-writer, The Edge. He'll detail the process of creating the track from the original demo to the final recording made with the other members of U2, drummer Larry Mullen Jr. and bassist Adam Clayton.

*("Cedarwood Road" by U2)*

*(Music fades)*

The Edge: Hi, this is The Edge. U2 songs can start from any kind of a beginning, a guitar part, a drum part, anything, really, that excites us and inspires us. So "Cedarwood Road" actually started with a guitar riff that I played at home.

*(Acoustic guitar)*

The Edge: I thought it was pretty exciting. So I got a couple of hours free one morning, and I started to try and see where this riff could go. But the problem when you've got a riff like that is, "Okay, great. How does it become a song?" I just thought the only thing to do is just make a scene change to get away from the riff

completely. So the next little bit of composition was the exit from the riff, which is this big, kind of a numbskull exit.

*(Acoustic guitar)*

The Edge: And that just was like the way to create the full stop for the next sentence. At this point, I'm at home, I've got GarageBand, which I use as a, kind of, sketch pad. And I've got a drum loop of Larry's that I'm using as a kind of backbeat.

*(Drums)*

The Edge: A few years ago, we figured out that I was doing all these demos with the drum machines and stuff, and Larry said, "Well, why don't I just make you some drum loops? And then, you can kind of do whatever the hell you want with them." So Larry's been, occasionally, if he felt like it, he'd just go in a studio with an engineer, and he just played drums for three hours and like all different tempos, different styles, whatever he was inspired to do. And then, they'd send them to me. And it's just so great for me. You know, when I'm working on a demo, I get a Larry beat, and it's always way better than anything I could come up with. And it sounds way better than any drum machine, so it's just a great starting point for me as a writer and a guitar player to have a great backbeat to work over.

*(Drums)*

*(Drums end)*

The Edge: My job is really to find a way to inspire Adam and Larry and Bono. So I don't often care to finish out a piece fully. I just want to get something down that I think is like a great starting point. And then, I know that, you know, whatever I come up with, they're going to come up with something better. So I just need to get it going where its identity is clear, and it's got some kind of vitality and point of view that's interesting. With this demo, it was just the riff, the end of the riff and the beginning of the verse.

*(Electric guitar, drums, and percussion)*

*(Synth, piano, electric guitar, bass, and drums)*

*(Synth, piano, bass, and drums)*

*(Music fades)*

The Edge: So we're in the studio, I'm playing back this little demo. And clearly we need some other sections, and I just remember Bono picking up the guitar, and he starts just playing this little melodic idea.

*(Electric guitar)*

The Edge: And I knew that there was something there, so I pick up the guitar as well. And so the two of us are like

*(Electric guitars)*

*(Music fades)*

The Edge: So his little motif actually becomes the intro to the song. And I'm like working on chord changes to try and tie it into what I've already written. And what transpires is that actually becomes the main chorus part. And we start trying to come up with new melody ideas that could take the song to some kind of crescendo.

*(Bass with drums)*

The Edge: That's when the song had really been composed as it were. And then, the lyric was the final part of that puzzle. We had an idea for it, lyrically. In fact, there was a completely different chorus lyric. It was like it had this other identity, but we mixed the song and we kind of listened, lived with it for a while. And I think we all felt that it really could be taken to another level. So Bono started trying different ideas for it. And he came up with the idea of writing it about "Cedarwood Road," the street that he grew up on.

*(Music ends)*

Bono: This is Bono here. I lived on a really nice street, quite a sweet place,

*(Piano)*

Bono: but behind the back garden, they began to build the seven towers. The seven towers were an experiment for Ireland in the 70s, and they became the kind of projects of North County Dublin. As a kid of 7 or 8 or 9, I would go out walking in the field. But by the time I was 13, 14, 15, things got a little different. Kids from the inner city had been forcibly relocated to these seven towers. Communities

had been broken up, and people who didn't know each other, forced to live together. So they were very unhappy. They were angry. They were annoyed. This were the people that we would meet as young teenagers. And it was very aggressive. And so, a lot of my early memories of teenage years were of violence, and the sheer fear of leaving the house, going to catch the bus.

*(Vocals: "I was running down the road / The fear was all I knew / I was looking for a soul that's real / Then I ran into you")*

Bono: My best friend, since I was three years old, is known to the world as, Guggi. He came from a family in 5 Cedarwood Road, and they were very religious. The father was like some figure from the Old Testament, and he was tough on those kids. And so, as well as the violence that I was experiencing from the outside, an exterior world of the tough neighborhoods that grew up around Cedarwood Road, we were responding to the violence that was *interior*, the domestic violence. And so, when I met Guggi, I kind of knew instinctively that he would be my comrade. And you make these decisions when you're a kid, without even understanding the gravity of them, you know, I've spent the rest of my life with him. He's still my best friend, even to this day.

*(Vocals: "And friendship, once it's won / It's won...it's won")*

Bono: I can tell you my absolutely favorite bit of the song has nothing to do with my singing or the words. It's Edge's guitar solo.

*(Electric guitar)*

Bono: Because that has all the dignity of that neighborhood. Some dark characters indeed, but the general decency of people, just goodness is in his guitar solo. I couldn't have achieved that.

The Edge: Bono loved the solo idea. And later on in the process of recording, he can't help himself, he starts singing over it.

*(Vocals with electric guitar: "If the door is open it isn't theft / You can't return to where you've never left / Blossoms falling from a tree, they cover you and cover me / Symbols clashing, Bibles smashing / Paint the world you need to see / Sometimes fear is the only place that we can call our home / Cedarwood Road")*

The Edge: It's a complicated song now. When Bono instinctively went "This is the Cedarwood Road song," suddenly all these musical motifs started to take on a different meaning. The music and the lyric combined in a way that paints a picture that either on their own really couldn't achieve. The kind of malevolent quality of the guitar, which makes perfect sense in the context of growing up in a very rough part of Dublin as it was then.

Bono: Myself and my friends dealt with the kind of skinhead, bootboy culture of the time by creating our own reality and eventually our own rock and roll band.

*(Xylophone)*

Bono: That's how we dealt with fear that we felt. And when I was writing about Cedarwood, the big revelation for me was you can't really leave these things behind because they are who you are. You can never escape your upbringing. You know, there's a part of me that's still there. I'm still on Cedarwood Road.

*(Music ends)*

Hrishikesh: And now, here's "Cedarwood Road," by U2, in its entirety.

*("Cedarwood Road" by U2)*

Hrishikesh: You can find all the past and future episodes of Song Exploder at [songexploder.net](http://songexploder.net) or on iTunes, Stitcher, or wherever you download podcasts. Find the show on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram @SongExploder. Song Exploder is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX, a curated network of extraordinary story-driven shows. Learn more at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). My name is Hrishikesh Hirway, thanks for listening.