



When Johnnie Comes Marchin' Home

I

*When Johnnie comes marchin' home again, haroo, haroo
When Johnnie comes marchin' home again, haroo, haroo
The men will cheer, the boys will shout, the ladies they will all turn out
And we'll be gay when Johnny comes marchin' home*

One of the things about exploring a life, making a journey around a life-a journey like this one-is the different perspectives one gets trying to make sense of things-put things together that happened over 40 years ago, connecting moments and events that didn't appear to have or couldn't have any relationship at the time. It feels very much that way when I look back at The Brothers Four performing for Homecoming at the University of Washington the weekend of November 15th, 1969.

Simon and Garfunkel had performed for Homecoming the year before. I'd returned in the fall of 68 for my senior year in college after a summer as a social worker in New York City. Our college singing group had also appeared and won a round of *Your All American College Show*, a national talent search that summer. I also held onto a dream of becoming a doctor like my dad. I had taken the MCAT, the medical college admission test, the spring of 68 and had applications for some dozen schools in, although Organic Chemistry and the competition for medical school spots made it sort of an unlikely dream. I thought about returning to New York to continue social work or maybe trying my luck in LA in music for a year or two. For the most part I had the vague dreams and the ambitions and imaginings of a lot 21-year-old kids. While it didn't feel like an aimless time I definitely was going off in a lot of different directions without a plan or purpose.

Because someone in our fraternity was in charge of entertainment for Homecoming he asked me if I wanted to pick up Simon and Garfunkel at the airport on Friday afternoon before the Alumni show and drop them off after the student concert on Saturday night. You bet I would. Their flight was delayed on Friday so they made other arrangements to get to the venue but as the Saturday night concert was winding down I was standing backstage with their manager and a couple of suitcases getting ready to take them to airport.

We were looking up at the stage when as casually as I could I asked the manager if he had any tips about how I might get into show business. He looked first at me than at the stage and finally at the suitcases.

"When the music stops," he said, "when the lights come up, and the audience has finished clapping, pick those up those suitcases and start walking as fast as you can to the car."

The funniest part of the story is that the manager was Mort Lewis, also the manager of The Brothers Four. When I met him again in New York City as a member of The Brothers Four he couldn't believe the coincidence, and he continued to tell that story for years about the great advice he gave to me.

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One of the things that makes the story even more wonderful is that when he was a kid growing up in Minneapolis Mort Lewis talked himself backstage with the Stan Kenton Band and when they were getting ready to leave town he convinced them that he'd be great at carrying their suitcases and that's how Mort got his start in show business.

II

*Where are your legs that used to run, haroo, haroo?
Where are your legs that used to run, haroo, haroo?
Where are your legs that used to run when first you went and carried a gun
Indeed your dancin' days are done
Johnnie, I hardly knew ya*

One of the things that changed significantly between November of 1968 and November year later was America's evolving involvement and Americans' mood toward the Viet Nam War. Richard Nixon was elected President in November of 1968 in part because he promised the American people that he had a secret plan for peace. In April of 1969 as a way of holding the new president to his promise Jerome Grossman, known to this day as the relentless liberal, called for a general strike if the war was not over by that fall.

That ultimatum led to the Moratorium Peace demonstration on the 15th of October. As it turned out I was in Washington, DC that week and took part in the march. I remember how peaceful it was and how hopeful we felt, how we all sang, even *Kumbaya* without a bit of irony along with songs like *We Shall Overcome*. I remember the candles that so many of us we carried along with the lasting memory of watching someone kneeling at the gates of the White House as the candle wax melted onto his wrists and forearms.

The idea was that people would gather peacefully on the 15th of every month until the war was over. It was a naïve faith that would be tested a few weeks later when Seymore Hersh, the same reporter who wrote about Abu Ghraib 35 years later, published the first public account of the My Lai massacre. It was hard to swallow and harder to digest that Americans could treat other human beings the way it was depicted in Hirsh's story. Over 500 civilians, many of them unarmed women and children, murdered by American servicemen. That next April it was reported that Nixon's secret peace plan had somehow morphed into secret wars in Laos and Cambodia, and on May 4th four young American's protesting those wars were gunned down by other young Americans wearing National Guard uniforms. Two more students were killed at Jackson State 10 days later.

So it was in November of 1969 that America was increasingly becoming a house divided as The Brothers Four prepared to perform for Homecoming at The University of Washington.

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III

*Where are your eyes that were so mild, haroo, haroo?
Where are your eyes that were so mild, haroo, haroo?
Where are your eyes that were so mild when my poor heart you first beguiled
Why did you run from me and the child?
Johnny, I hardly knew ya*

That November the University of Washington was an institution divided as well. One of the highlights of Homecoming Weekend has always been the football game with students and alumni cheering as one in this case against the team that was from Southern California. But that season there'd been suspensions of African American players showing support for one of their own followed by shows of support by alumni for Jim Owens, the head coach, who a decade earlier had restored the luster of west coast football with two Rose Bowl victories and was now suffering through what would be a one win season.

Ken Ballenger was a captain of that 1969 team. He and I had been co-captains on the freshmen football team in the fall of 65 for the cross state rivalry game against the Washington State. As someone who left college sports after one year it was a continuing education for me to watch politics played out now on those playing fields.

Bob Hope, the homecoming headliner, added his voice to the cacophony that weekend. After years of simply being recognized as a universally beloved comedian and movie star, he and others like John Wayne, were more and more making public patriotic proclamations that often included disdainful putdowns of those who thought or acted differently than they. Which on that weekend would include me. My protest on Friday night for the Alumni and Saturday for the students incorporated a black armband and a passionate anti-war rendition of *When Johnny Comes Marchin' Home*, my respect for the other three Brothers Four increasing then as they stood with me in quiet solidarity.

IV

*You haven't an arm you haven't a leg, haroo, haroo
You haven't an arm you haven't a leg, haroo, haroo
You haven't an arm you haven't a leg you're an eyeless boneless chicken-less egg
And you'll have to be put in a cup to beg
Can anyone tell me why?
Johnny, I hardly knew ya*

If in the fall of 1969 the country was becoming a house divided and homecomings increasingly divisive, that time for me personally revealed much that I could not reconcile beginning with learning few months earlier that the man I idolized, my dad, had been in a mental institution when I was born. It was a piece I could not make fit.

In Northern Ireland they called it called peace and reconciliation, in South Africa truth and reconciliation. In each case it was a country long divided looking for ways

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to get past their often-bloody past and stand together on common ground. I believe with individuals as well as nations there can be no reconciliation without truth and no peace without reconciliation, and so I am grateful for one of those times in a life where on so many levels I am finally able to reconcile the often irreconcilable, to know where truth lies, and so know that peace abides, hoping that songs and stories and campfires offer warmth and light to anyone finding their way back home.

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They're rolling out the guns again, haroo, haroo
They're rolling out the guns again, haroo, haroo
They're rolling out the guns again, they'll never take my sons again
No, they'll never take my sons again
Johnny I'm swearing to ya!

Some say the world will end in fire, some say in ice
From what I've tasted of desire I hold with those who favor fire
But if I had to perish twice, I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice is also great and would suffice



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