



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

Can't Help But Wonder

I

*It's a long and a dusty road a hot and a heavy load
The folks that I meet aint always kind
Some are bad some are good some have done the best they could
Some have tried to ease my troubled mind
And I can't help but wonder where I'm bound, where I'm bound
Can't help but wonder where I'm bound*

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That's the first verse of *Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound*, a song written by Tom Paxton over fifty years ago. I've been fortunate enough to meet Tom a few times. He's one of the good guys and a truly great American folk songwriter. A versatile songwriter and keen observer of the human condition he gives voice to the child in each of us with songs like *The Marvelous Little Toy*, he helps us laugh together with songs like *I'm Changing My Name To Chrysler*, and he lets us all extend a hand of friendship with songs like *Ramblin' Boy*.

I learned this particular song, *Can't Help But Wonder Where I'm Bound*, off a Chad Mitchell Trio record and started singing it when I was fifteen years old. The most poignant version might be the one that Johnny Cash recorded a few months before he died that's now part of his sixth and final album of *American Recordings*, that album called *Aint No Grave*. It's a song for the ages, for all ages, for wherever we might be bound.

With this Chronicle that begins the third stage of this seven-stage journey I'm bound and determined to share these campfires and this adventure around a lifetime. One of America's great biographers, David McCullough, talks about how when he was looking for a new project he opened the door to a closet full of un-catalogued source material about and from John Adams. He was overjoyed thinking that finding the story in all these boxes that was where he was bound to spend the next three years. His wife who was with him at the time looked at the same closet and thought to herself, oh, no, we are bound to be trapped in the contents of this closet for the next three years.

The truth I look around my office at the boxes of papers, photographs, newspaper clippings, all the song lyrics hand written, typed, computer generated, and all the decades of writing projects in various stages of completion and disarray, and see all the reel to reel and cassette tapes waiting to be put into a digital format and I have both David McCullough's reaction *and* that of his wife. What an amazing way I say to spend the present getting a new perspective on the future by spinning threads of the past into yarns and weaving those yarns into unique tapestries. And as I look at it all there's also a part of me that can't help but wonder where I'm bound.



Let love go forward from this time and place...



II

*I've been around this land just doin' the best I can
Tryin' to find what I was meant to do
And the faces that I see they're as worried as can be
Looks like they are a wonderin' too
And I can't help but wonder where I'm bound, where I'm bound
Can't help but wonder where I'm bound*

In the early 1970's a guy with a guitar and a half decent repertoire could make a good living singing around Seattle at various restaurant bars. It was before disco became mainstream, before the fear of AIDS changed the dating scene, before too many pre-records and drum machines, and before logic and litigation made us all realize how stupid it was to drink and drive and all that that means. Restaurant owners could buy a self contained Shure Vocalmaster sound system and fairly easily and inexpensively turn a cocktail lounge into a small show room where people could wait for dinner listening to familiar music and come back after dessert for a nightcap and request their favorite song.

Trendy Northwest dining of the time often meant steakhouses with salad bars. In the Seattle area the Hindquarter chain was among the most popular. Starting in the spring of 1971 I played regularly at their various restaurant bars. My plan was to write songs all day and sing all night. While I sharpened a lot of pencils and I looked at lots of blank sheets of paper for a lot of mornings I often gave up songwriting after an hour or two and instead learned another new song from what appeared to be an endless pantheon of singers and songwriters.

Besides the dozen that were chronicled in the last campfire there was Glen Campbell introducing us to the music of Jimmy Webb, Cat Stevens offering tea for the Tillerman, Don McLean dishing up one big serving of American Pie, Jimmy Buffett blending his own concoction into what would become Margaritaville, Jim Croce hoping to put time in a bottle. There were those that caught lightning in a bottle: John Hartford with *Gentle on My Mind*, Steve Goodman with *City of New Orleans*, Jerry Jeff Walker with *Mr. Bojangles*. And although he might have been overexposed and therefore underappreciated, man, did I love singing Neil Diamond's songs back then. I still do.

There were a lot of songs to choose from and I sang them all with passion as I pounded away at my guitars hard enough to need to put special pick guards on them and somehow make breaking strings appear to be a part of the act. Night after night I stood or sat in front of a group mostly my age, all of us newly cast in the role of adults, each of us slowly finding our places and defining and refining our personal styles.

McCoy often sang with me on those weekends and the last Saturday of a booking became a closing night and a reason for friends to gather and for someone to buy a tray of shots of tequila and offer some form of the toast "Here's to us."

Let love go forward from this time and place...



III

*Had a buddy way back home he started out to roam
I hear he's out by Frisco Bay
And some times when I had a few his voice comes singin' through
Think I'll go see him some old day
And I can't help but wonder where I'm bound, where I'm bound
Can't help but wonder where I'm bound*

For the month of July in 1971 and in January of 1972 I sang at a restaurant in Sun Valley called The Ore House. For most guys starting in the mid-60's it had been stay in school or get drafted and likely end up in Viet Nam so when the Draft Lottery went into affect in 1970 it meant that those born on days that corresponded to high lottery numbers could leave school for a quarter or a semester without any real fear of being drafted. Ski resorts became magnets for them and for singers who loved the mountains.

And just to set the record straight I ended up taking the easy way out when it came to the Draft. Intellectually I contemplated moving to Canada and while I briefly looked into becoming a conscientious objector, the reality is that I have a congenital back issue that doesn't bother me much but back then made me unqualified for military service so when I dropped out of college to join The Brothers Four I simply flunked my physical and put my draft card with the 1-Y, medically unqualified, deferment in my wallet and let it go at that.

Summer in Sun Valley is wonderful. I did a lot of hiking during the day back then. I discovered a memorial to Ernest Hemingway Memorial and took that short walk off Trail Creek to a spot where there is a small bust of the author and an epitaph he wrote about a friend who died in a hunting accident: *Best of all he loved the fall. The leaves yellow on the cottonwoods. Leaves floating on the trout streams and above the hills. The high blue windless skies; now he will be part of them forever.*

Jim Morrison of The Doors died the month I was in Sun Valley and articles about his death made reference to Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin who had both died the previous year, each of them before their 28th birthday. At twenty-four years old I spent a lot of time sitting at Hemingway's Memorial wondering what it meant to be an artist, what it might mean to live for my art and maybe even die for it. Questions I could not answer.

McCoy came with me in January. We stayed at a condo near Warm Springs that a guy had built earlier that year and named Powder Horn. It had thin walls and small bedrooms and one night I had a nightmare that McCoy teases me about to this day. For years I was somehow ashamed of those nightmares. They're not as common as they were then. They no longer embarrass me and still they remain a stubborn part of my journey. A bridge to some darker side perhaps a hallway to the light.

That winter in Sun Valley I was introduced to a fellow named Pat Sands. You'll be hearing more about him in future campfires. Let me just say that he took the biggest bites out of life I've ever seen and enjoyed them as much as anybody I've ever known.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



IV

*So if you see me passin' by and you sit and wonder why
Think that you'd like to ramble, too
Nail your shoes to the kitchen floor lace 'em up and bar the door
And thank the stars for the roof that's over you
And I can't help but wonder where I'm bound, where I'm bound
Can't help but wonder where I'm bound*

It is likely that I met Bob Dylan's brother, David Zimmerman, at a show in Minneapolis where he was living when The Brothers Four performed there. My memory says that after getting back from Sun Valley in February of 1972 I gave him a call about possible jobs in Minnesota, and we ended up talking about my moving there and him becoming my manager. While I had not developed much as a songwriter it had been a successful year performing in the Northwest and I was trying to figure out the next step. Relocating to Minnesota that didn't seem very far-fetched. Though my family moved to Spokane when I was five years old I was born there and I had a lot of extended family there. It was where John Denver staged his career from before moving to Colorado, where Leo Kottke lived and where he toured from.

So in the spring of 72 I loaded my van and I headed to the Twin Cities. I'd just turned 25, had a full beard, aviator glasses with photo gray lenses, twenty extra pounds on a former lineman's body. It was more a bulky Kenny Rogers look than what I really wanted to exude and emulate which was a lean Kris Kristofferson cool. Of course that's a hard look to achieve when you're an often a compulsive eater.

While David Zimmerman had recently married and moved to the suburbs he still had a furnished apartment near the University of Minnesota in an area known as Dinkytown where his brother had lived before moving to New York. It's where I stayed. It was a great location, lots of easy walks along the Mississippi River. And still the apartment was pretty dark which after a few weeks began to reflect my mood. I sang some clubs got introduced to a few promoters and after a few months I was lonely and unable to find a way to find a way to grow as a songwriter.

David told me his brother wrote songs for six hours every day and that Dylan even had a timer that he'd stop when he got up to do something and then turn on again when he got back to writing to make sure he got his hours in. That became a goal of mine, one of those if it's good enough for Bob Dylan it sure must be good enough for me. The problem is that when I didn't get the six hours in, which was many days, I was pretty hard on myself, and that often made the next day's writing even harder.

Through all of that I kept thinking about a woman who I'd first met in grade school who was now living in Seattle. We talked about her joining me in Minneapolis. Our parents thought maybe you should get married first, that is what people did then. We set a date for September. I got a job singing in Estes Park, Colorado for the month of July. She came with me. We hiked a lot.

Let love go forward from this time and place...



August a road trip for the two of us visiting National Parks in Utah, friends in Southern California, and finally a slow meander up the Pacific coast on Highway One. We got married in Northern Idaho in September. Instead of heading to Minnesota we chose to spend the winter in a summer beach cottage on Vashon Island not far from Seattle. She worked part time at the University, I got a few guitar students and occasional studio work. The idea was to somehow in that idyllic setting to magically discover and develop the songwriter inside me and to emerge that spring finally found and fully formed. It was a beautiful dream.

*No, I can't help but wonder where I'm bound, where I'm bound
Can't help but wonder where I'm bound*



Let love go forward from this time and place...