



Nashville

I

*Johnny ran out of money somewhere in New Jersey
He was run out of town two towns ago
He's run out of luck run out of warm weather
But he still hasn't run out of places to go*

Chorus

*Some dreams are ended before they begin
Some dreams begin and seem never to end
Some dreams die aborning and some they grow old
But most they just run out of time*

That's the first verse and chorus of a song I wrote in 1975 called *Some Dreams*. It's a song that helped opened some doors in Nashville that year including an offer to become an unpaid staff writer with one of the town's largest publishing companies, Tree International.

Beginning that year Nashville literally and figuratively became for me an Emerald City where I believed if I could simply find my way through the right door a wizard would be waiting to listen to my songs and somehow spin them into gold and that gold would somehow lead me to a rich and satisfying life and career.

At least that's how my unformed, unfocused dreams believed it could be when I returned to Seattle after singing with McCoy in Sun Valley the first month of 1974. For the rest of that year while performing at restaurant lounges at night and working on my songs during the day I kept hearing, reading, and sensing that I needed to go where the action was, in the music business that pretty much meant New York, LA, or Nashville.

While I'd grown up thinking that Nashville was mostly a place that made music my dad listened to by the late 60's Dylan had tipped his hat to the "Nashville Skyline," Kristofferson was adding his songs and stories to the Nashville legend, and Johnny Cash, who in 1963 had appeared with The Brothers Four in a movie called "Hootenanny Hoot," had begun introducing music and musicians from Nashville on his own national TV show.

What sealed the deal for me to visit Nashville instead of LA or New York was that I knew somebody who knew somebody who was in the music business, the sister of an aunt of a friend. Her name was Dolores Dinning Edgin. She was the youngest of 9 kids. In the 40's and 50's three of her older siblings recorded as the Dinning Sisters and four of their songs even ended up on the charts. While they were compared on their way up to The Andrews Sisters and on their way down to The Lennon Sisters of Lawrence Welk fame, the Dinning's didn't quite make it big enough to have groups compared to them. One of the sisters, Jean, also helped write *Teen Angel* a song that became a hit for one of the sister's brothers, Mark Dinning. That song was a real tearjerker, among the first to make tragic death and timeless love popular subjects in rock and roll.

Dolores herself had carved out a career as a member of The Nashville Edition, a quartet in demand as back up singers for lots of recordings and as featured artists

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on the syndicated TV show, Hee Haw. Most important to me she was someone in the music business who sounded nice on the phone and encouraged me to come to Nashville to check things out and she would do what she could to help.

II

*Some dreams are ended before they begin
Some dreams begin and seem never to end
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While Nashville is known to some as the Buckle of the Bible Belt and to others with its full sized replica of the Parthenon as the Athens of the South much of the world knows it as Music City. In the 70's Music City was still a relatively small town. The heart of the business, Music Row consisted mostly of two main streets 16th and 17th Avenue east of Vanderbilt and south of Belmont Universities. The blocks closest to downtown were renamed Music Squares East and West with the competing music-licensing organizations, BMI on Music Square East and ASCAP on Music Square West each anchoring the entrance to half a mile of what was once residences but now were mainly offices for people making their livings creating and selling country music.

In 1975 a battle was underway for the soul of country music. Charlie Rich, the previous winner of Country Music Entertainer of the Year, famously or infamously burned the paper that named John Denver as the newest winner. A year later *The Outlaws*, an album featuring Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson, became the first country album to sell over a million copies. While Garth Brooks was still a few years away from permanently putting rock elements into the music, traditionalists would continue to argue that the changes sold the music out until Brooks appeared to make that argument moot by out selling everyone except Elvis and The Beatles.

When I first walked those streets in January of 1975 country music was more a family business than big business. I tasted my first grits at the Pancake Pantry where Chet Atkins often went for breakfast. I got a first hand view of Southern hospitality when Dolores invited me to a Billy Crash Craddock recording session and everyone was friendly and everyone was welcoming including one of my heroes the banjo innovator Bobby Thompson.

That week Dolores had gotten me an appointment with Del Bryant. The son of friends of hers Del was working at BMI in songwriters and publishers relations. Organizations like BMI are set up to make sure that songwriters and publishers get paid when their songs are played or performed. They track or have formulas to track when a song is played at a club or a concert hall, on the radio, TV, the movies and these days the Internet. Each time a song is played in a restaurant or an elevator or a dentist's office or the mall songwriters and publishers are owed something. That can begin to add up because there are a lot of elevators and malls in this world and some songs keep earning money long after they were first recorded. John Stewart of The Kingston Trio made a lot of money from a song he

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wrote called "Day Dream Believer" that became a hit for the Monkees, and a few years after that it became a hit for Anne Murray, then was used in several national commercial campaigns. He called it one of his couch songs because it kept making him money even when he was sitting on the couch at home.

Publishers are important, in my case essential, to getting songs to artists and producers. For doing this the songwriter and the publisher splits any money earned by the song fifty-fifty. Organizations like BMI have people like Del Bryant to listen to songs from people like me and if they like what they hear the introduce people like me to publishers.

When I first visited Nashville BMI was a one-story building with a small well-lit waiting area. Del came out of his office to greet me. It was at a time where reel-to-reel tapes were the standard so I had created these tapes with three songs on them and colored leaders between each song so when he listened he could easily skip ahead to the beginning of a song which he often did.

Del has gone on to be the CEO and President of BMI. He has a gift my dad had. That is when you are with him you get a sense that there's nowhere else he'd rather be and that no one is more important at that moment than you are. That's what I felt when Del called Cedarwood Publishing and made an appointment for me.

The people liked what they heard. They wanted to publish three songs. The first song contract I ever signed was for a song I'd written for my dad. It was a song inspired by a Fredrick Langbridge quote that goes: "Two men look from the same prison bars one seeing the mud and the other the stars." Flying back to Seattle at the end of that week I felt the stars were close enough to touch.

III

*Before she ran out of reasons for running away
Or ran out of excuses for all she'd never be
Julie ran into love in Oklahoma
Love never was what it turned out to be*

*Chorus
You see some dreams are ended before they begin
Some dreams begin and seem never to end
Some dreams die aborning and some they grow old
But most they just run out of time*

In the fall of 75 I made a second trip to Nashville with a satchel full of new songs a few months after Robert Altman's film "Nashville" came out and created even more myths about the city situated on the banks of the Cumberland River.

The week I was there Delores and her husband invited me to dinner at their house so they could introduce me to a few of their friends in the music business. While Delores made it clear that these people didn't usually sing at informal gatherings she asked if I would bring my guitar and maybe even sing a song or two.

Delores had invited two couples. One was Liz and Casey Anderson. A few years earlier their daughter, Lynn, had recorded a Joe South song called "I Never Promised

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You a Rose Garden.” The song topped the charts and won Lynn a Grammy for Female Country Vocal Performance and the album, produced by Clive Davis, helped introduce Kris Kristofferson to the world with Lynn’s versions of “For The Good Times” and “Sunday Morning Coming Down.” “Rose Garden” was such a big hit that a few years later I cracked myself up imagining Richard Nixon singing it to Gerald Ford, “I beg your pardon and I promise you the Rose Garden.”

At dinner that night the second couple was Del Bryant’s parents. While I wasn’t familiar with who they were Del’s mother, Felice, was outgoing and warm while his dad, Boudleau, who sat next to me at dinner, was quiet. He was unassuming with a well-trimmed goatee wearing horned rimmed glasses and a tweed sports jacket. From time to time he took a Vantage cigarette out of a pack that he kept in an inside pocket. I remember a lot of laughter that night and how comfortable dinner was. Dolores made Southern Fried Chicken from her own recipe. Everyone seemed genuinely interested in who I was and how did I like their town?

After dinner still at the dining room table I picked up my guitar and sang “Some Dreams.” Everyone attentive. Everyone quiet and then the man next to me in the horn rimmed glasses looked up and said,

“You have all the talent you’ll ever need. Now all you need is some luck.”

What I didn’t realize until a moment later was that I had been given a blessing by one of the most successful songwriters in the history of country music. Surprisingly he asked if he could borrow my guitar. He strummed a G major chord a few times and then said quietly,

“This is a song my wife and I wrote a few years ago,” and he began to sing in a practiced country style with his wife, suddenly reflective, singing quietly though confidently along with him.

*“Dre-e-e-am...dream, dream, dre-eam
When I see you in the night when I feel blue I hold you tight
Whenever I want you all I have to do is dream”*

Talk about *Some Dreams!* As he sat holding my guitar and I sat next to him in stunned silence and reverence it was as if he’d figuratively removed his glasses off pulled back the lapels of his tweed jacket and revealed to me that while he might appear to be Clark Kent he truly was a musical Superman. There is a quote by Boudleau Bryant that I discovered years later that describes the success that he and his wife enjoyed:

“Unless you feel driven to compose and at the same time have all the instincts of a Mississippi riverboat gambler,” the quote begins, “you should never seek songwriting as a profession. Unless you know in your heart that you’re great, feel in your bones that you’re lucky, and think in your soul that God just might let you get away with it, pick something more certain, like chasing a white whale or eradicating the common housefly. Felice and I didn’t have the benefits of such sage advice and now it’s too late to back up. We made it. Sometimes it pays to be ignorant.”

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Sitting there that night I was no longer ignorant of who was sitting next to me as he and Felice sang a rousing version of a song they'd written that the state of Tennessee had made its own, "Rocky Top."

Looking back I realize I have been lucky but I guess never really knew in my heart I was great or believed in my soul that God wanted me to get away with it and still it's too late for me to back up. I will always be grateful for that moment when Superman told me I too might fly. And while I haven't flown over many rainbows, simply chasing them and the gold I hoped was at the end of them was often all I needed to keep going.

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IV

*Some dreams are ended before they begin
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In the middle of the week I got an appointment with one of the largest publishing companies, Tree International. They liked my stuff well enough to offer me a three-year contract to be one of their staff writers. I was flattered and flabbergasted but because I did not plan on moving to Nashville right then I told them I would need to think about it. That day I was introduced to some other young staff writers. One of them, a guy named Jamie O'Hara, invited me to stay with him and his wife for the rest of the week. He was from Indiana and the year before he'd moved to Nashville he written songs in and about Maine. We ended up sitting around his living room sharing songs that we'd written with each other and for other writers who were just getting started.

One of the guys named John was a great talker who wrote songs and sang songs in the John Prine style. He told a story about getting a haircut a few days earlier and how the barber asked him what he did.

"Well," John replied, "if you cut hair and didn't get paid for it would you still be a barber."

The barber thought for a minute and said, "Yeah, I'd still a barber."

John caught his eye in the mirror and said, "Well, I'm a songwriter."

We all laughed but no bodfy harder than John.

Through the years I've kept in touch with Jamie who ended up with a wonderful career. In 1986 he formed a duo with Kieren Kane called The O'Kanes. They recorded three albums for Columbia and had seven charted singles. Jamie also wrote the Grammy Award winning "Grandpa, Tell Me Bout the Good Old Days" recorded by the Judds. Before heading back to Seattle I stopped in Minneapolis and met with David Zimmerman. David encouraged me to remain true to the dream of being a singer-songwriter and developing my individual voice instead of writing

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songs for someone else. He read through the contract that Tree was offering and was candid in saying that it was written in favor of the company. He challenged me to develop a sense of story when I was working on my songs and when I went home and started writing again that's what I tried to do.

At the same time I wrote a letter to Tree International saying that I looked forward to continuing to work with them but I wanted to leave my options open and said no to their staff writing position. What I realize now is by the time I made up my mind they had already moved on and had sifted through hundreds of tapes of songwriters who came by every day with the same dreams that I had. While I would return to Nashville numerous times in the next twenty-five years with varying degrees of success the walls would never be as easy to scale or the doors as easy to open as that September in 1975.

*They ran together on a freight toward the west coast
They shivered and shared in the Oregon rain
Never ran into words that said "Where are we goin'?"
Don't matter much when you chase after trains*

Chorus

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