



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

Starting Over

I

*Taking chances making changes another small step down the line
Along the road I'm traveling not sure of what I'll find
Might hit a streak of losers or by some chance just might win
All I know for certain is this time won't come again
Success might turn impostor or failure satisfy
Something that's discovered somewhere deep inside
So when it's over may I look back and see the ends were justified
And understand the meaning of what it was to try*

Chorus

*There's not too much between the winners and the losers
It's a fine line between the beggars and the choosers
Not far from being born to dying
It's a long way from anywhere once you give up trying*

That's the first verse and chorus of a song called *The Winners and The Losers*. The last few months of 1978 and the first few of 79, it was a time of isolation, separation, and very little inspiration, and I was sure I was a loser both personally and professionally. It was hard to imagine a way forward or find reasons to get out of bed in the morning. I felt embarrassed and paralyzed by shame. Filled with those feelings it was hard to reach out to friends, many of them I hadn't seen for more than a year. My folks were out of the country. My brothers were busy. They and their wives knew and they liked my wife so I became hypersensitive whenever it appeared they chose her over me. Although I still had no language for it the family heritage of depression and anxiety was playing a role in how I was feeling. All that negative energy kept growing until I didn't even want to be around myself. Most days the shades were drawn and the TV was on.

When I did get off the couch there was that nagging question of what I would or could or should do next. Like getting a job. I wrote a few songs and filled more sketchbooks. I made a trip to LA to see publishers who seemed to like what they heard but found nothing they could use. I gathered the best of ten years of original song lyrics. I bound them into a book and I gave it to friends and family for Christmas. A neighbor took some publicity photos in case I got back into nightclub singing. I thought about going back to school or maybe going in and find a sales job.

The highlight of most weeks was Saturday afternoon when after watching Professional Bowling on ABC with Chris Schenkel and his sidekick Bo Burton I got into the car and drove from Seattle to Tacoma where my older brother and his wife lived. We'd have dinner and play low stakes poker with a few of their friends. In later years when my relationship with my brother was difficult and distant those Saturday nights remained a remembered reservoir of good will.

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While I certainly didn't know it at the time, that long dark winter contained many gifts, and taught me things I couldn't or wouldn't learn any other way. There was time to grieve losses professional and personal. I learned on new levels humility and empathy. That darkness gave me a new appreciation for the simple precious light of day, gifts that to this day I value yet too easily ignore and often overlook.

When I was wrestling in high school I thought I knew what the coach meant when he said it's not a matter of how many times you fall down but that you get back up that matters. That winter I learned what those words can mean when you simply can't get up.

And then the phone rang and spring came.

II

*So many nightclub hours and all of those words that rhyme
May not have brought me closer to a goal I can't define
There's a satisfaction success may never know
Staying a part of me no matter how it goes
And Lord knows I may not make it or even if I can
But I'm thankful for the people who have helped me understand it's
A long way from knowing yourself to someone knowing your name
Success is all around us it's called the loving of the game*

Chorus

*There's not too much between the winners and the losers
It's a fine line between the beggars and the choosers
Not far from being born to dying
It's a long way from anywhere once you give up trying*

Bob Flick called in early March and wondered if we could get together. He came to my place and talked about a six-week tour of Japan including an appearance at the 8th Annual Tokyo Music Festival that had been arranged for The Brothers Four. It was scheduled to begin in the middle of June. John Paine could not be away from home that long so Bob was wondering if I'd be willing to go in John's place. *You know I think I would.* He then mentioned what sounded like an astronomical amount of money that each guy would be paid. I mumbled something. As he was leaving we shook hands and talked about having our first rehearsal in a week or two. After he left I closed the door and let out a long sigh and started to cry.

For this one tour the group would consist of original members Bob Flick and Dick Foley, the guy who'd replaced me, Bob Haworth, and myself. We rehearsed at my house. Before the guys arrived I opened the shades. The bantering and the give and take started that first day and the feeling of camaraderie washed over me like a warm rain. Dick has always collected jokes and every day it seemed like he had a new to tell. Bob is the most naturally funny person I have ever met. One day we were talking about possibly running into Mormon missionaries when we

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played in Hokkaido. With a straight face and without missing a beat Bob said, oh that reminds me of that Mormon comedian Brigham Youngman, takes my wives, please, please, please, please. To this day I don't know when I've laughed as hard or appreciated laughter more.

In late May McCoy who was always looking for the next physical challenge convinced me to be part of his team for the Ski to Sea race outside of Bellingham. For me that meant paddling a canoe for over twenty miles. The week before the tour started the Seattle Supersonics won the NBA Championship and, in a time before Microsoft, Grunge music, Starbucks, or Amazon, the whole town was one brightly lit joyous village.

Touring in Japan has always been a special experience for The Brothers Four. The hotels we stay in are classier, the food is better, and the travel easier. The group has a special place in the heart of most audiences there. People simply saw me as a member of the group as we checked into the Prince Hotel next to the Tokyo Tower to get ready for the 8th Annual Tokyo Music Festival.

There were a number of acts from Asia that had been invited. The US acts included Rita Coolidge who was traveling with her mother and sister though not with her husband, Kris Kristofferson. David Soul, one of the stars of the *Starsky and Hutch* TV series was starting a musical career. He was there and so was Al Jarreau with his signature scarf and singing style. Sergio Mendes was also part of the festival that would take place at the famous Nippon Budokan not far from the Imperial Palace.

The lead up to the event included four days of receptions, press conferences, TV shows, radio interviews, and rehearsals with the orchestra. I almost didn't know what to do with the disconnect between where I was at that moment and where I had been a few months earlier. The festival itself was promoted as a contest although everyone won something with Rita Coolidge taking home the Grand Prize.

After the festival The Brothers Four hit the road for twenty-six shows in twenty-five cities in thirty-one days. It may be as far reaching and ambitious a tour as the group has ever done. Twenty-one of those shows were the Kanebo Lady 80's tour sponsored by Kanebo beauty products. Each one of those shows included a contest that selected a woman from the audience to be the 80's Lady. We traveled with an entourage that included four Japanese women singers who helped with the nightly contests.

The whole experience was tonic for my spirit. I was living in the moment and appreciating every moment. Where I'd been before this trip and where I was going after it simply didn't matter. Each day had a sense of purpose and direction. I remember reading *Shogun* on the Bullet Train looking up from time to time at the Japanese countryside satiated and satisfied.

Dick had recently married and his wife, Mary, was making her first trip to Japan. She and I bonded instantly. While I'm mostly a meat and potatoes guy I promised myself on that trip no matter what was put in front of me I would try everything at least once. Mary said she would try anything I tried. So we laughed and made faces all over Japan, both a little squeamish about things like the mini-crustaceans that crawled around on the plate before we each popped one in our mouths and

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swallowed it whole. Bob Haworth brought his young son, Graham, so the whole tour was a family affair.

That year was the beginning of the video game craze. Space Invaders had just been released in Japan. It was so popular that the country had trouble keeping hundred yen coins in circulation. After a show Bob Flick and I would often go in search of an arcade and play for an hour or so. It's the only video game I ever got any good at. For a long time Bob had intimidated me. Those nights changed all of that in the best of ways.

With every day so affirming I didn't want the tour to end though when it did I kept going because my parents wanted me to visit and what could be simpler than going from Tokyo to Seattle by way of Pretoria, South Africa.

III

*Sometimes I start to wonder what is all of this trying for
It seems I'm spending so much of my time rising from the floor
And as I look around I see that life it isn't fair
So full of frustrations sometimes it grows hard to care
But then it dawns upon me and I'm thankful for the chance
Of seeing what I can in life and joining in the dance
And the dance might form a circle to enclose a magic ring
Which might just give us the answers explaining everything*

Repeat Chorus

*There's not too much between the winners and the losers
It's a fine line between the beggars and the choosers
Not far from being born to dying
It's a long way from anywhere once you give up trying*

It took forty hours to go from Tokyo to Pretoria including a Paris to Pretoria leg on a DC-10 a few days after the DC-10 fleet had been returned to service following an investigation into a fatal crash in Chicago earlier in the year. In the middle of the night the plane flew near a lightening storm over Central Africa, and I remember a father a few seats away talking gently to his kids as the lightening flashed and lit up the eerily quiet and darkened cabin.

The plane arrived early. I watched my parents' car winding toward the airport from a mile away. We'd last seen each other as they crossed Ventura Boulevard to the strains of "Marching to Pretoria." Driving to Pretoria that morning both of them talked about how much time they were spending together these days. They are good people who fell in love quickly and married compulsively. They had no money at the time so they took care of nephews and nieces on their honeymoon, lived with another couple their first year of marriage followed by a year when my dad was overseas because of the war and the year after that was the time in the mental hospital. When I was born into that uncertain spring of 1947 my folks had been married three years had two kids while spending less than a week together just the two them. Their relationship became a blend of love and respect and commitment

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to each the family and their marriage vows. Now after more than thirty busy hectic years my dad had retired from private medical practice to become a doctor in the Foreign Service and with that a chance for them to truly get to know themselves and each other.

It was fun to see how well they fit into the Foreign Service community. People loved my dad's laugh and my mom's curiosity. My dad was part of a poker group. They became best friends with another couple who taught them the Foreign Service ropes. While they were respectful of the social structure my folks were iconoclastic enough to not take any of it too seriously.

My parents worked hard to show me Southern Africa. They set up meetings with Embassy personnel to talk about US attitudes toward the Apartheid laws. I heard an anecdote about the Europeans bringing libraries with them when they settled America but only a Bible when they settled South Africa. There was a conversation with a white Afrikaner who wouldn't defend Apartheid but he did talk about how Americans dealt with their Native populations by killing them and their Black population by enacting Jim Crow Laws.

My folks and I took a road trip to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland where my dad looked in on Foreign Service employees. We visited a gold mine and a diamond mine. I learned that diamonds are found in the center of extinct volcanoes in a type of rock called kimberlite named after the town of Kimberly in South Africa where diamonds were first mined in the 1870's.

(Through the years I've used hard rock mining as a metaphor for life. We dig intricate tunnels leaving behind tons of tailings all for a few hoped for precious stones or ounces of precious metal.)

My folks and I spent several days and nights in Kruger Park watching and listening to incomparable animal life. We drove from Pretoria to Cape Town through the Transvaal. For the only time in my life I walked along the shore of the Indian Ocean. We returned to Pretoria on the Blue Train as I re-read Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* with Paton's beloved country going by just outside the window. There were incomparably warm and still nights where I would search the sky for the Southern Cross and always delight when I found it.

Arrangements were made for me to meet a musician in the black Township of Mamelodi. I was advised to scrunch down as we entered and left that township. I don't remember the musician's name but I remember a picture of Wes Montgomery on the living room wall of the small dirt floored house he shared with his wife and kids. When I told him I was just a folk singer he smiled and said, "It's all music." And music is what we all made that night in a room filled with his friends and fellow musicians.

Most important in that time in South Africa was a chance for me to begin facing important truths about myself, as I prepared to go home and start my life again. I realized part of the shame I was feeling came from believing I had brought shame on the family. It helped in the healing to hear my parents say out loud that that was not the case. I also recognized I needed to learn to explore and better explain my feelings. The process began in tentative small steps with my mother. Growing up

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my relationship with her had been difficult and strained and I was often filled with anger I couldn't explain. I knew somehow to have healthier female relationships I needed to have a better with her. She and I made a verbal promise to find new and better places together. Thirty-five years later with all our ups and downs I realize it's a promise that we've kept kept, kept together.

Looking back it's also clear how important it was to see my parents happy and seemingly without a care because two years later when I saw my dad again he was facing a financial crisis that would bring him to his knees and force the family individually and together to face our biggest unspoken fears.

IV

*There's not too much between the winners and the losers
It's a fine line between the beggars and the choosers
Not far from being born to dying
It's a long way from anywhere once you give up trying*

And then it was time to go home. The time away had given me a way to begin again. Because my friend, Gary Drager, had recently married and was willing to rent me his old place for a great price, I was moving into new old house. Because someone had rear ended and totaled my car the week before I left, I was driving a new used car. Then a few weeks after I got home I started talking with a woman at a dinner party at the Draggers and when we finally stopped talking it was morning and time to start a new day. One of the things she said was that she'd heard success was having something to do, someone to love, and something to look forward to. Sharing a cup of coffee as the sun came up I thought this feels like success. Maybe I'm not a loser after all.

*It's a long way from anywhere once you give up trying
Hope I never give up trying*



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