



Joanne and the Sandman

I

*Sometimes I get weary down in my soul
Sometimes I get weary down in my bones
Sometimes I get weary and feeling so low
Sometimes I get weary nowhere to go*

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After three successful days in the studio I headed to Spokane to be with my dad and hoping to get a better sense of what was going on. It was clear the financial mess, stress and distress was overwhelming and that my dad's emotional health remained fragile. There was nothing I knew to do except try to be there for that proud man that I loved so much.

My younger brother was living and working as a lawyer in Spokane where most of the investments were. He agreed to try to make sense and manage the financial predicament while Dad returned to Yugoslavia to complete the eleven months that he had left on a contract with the Foreign Service. These were hard decisions and in retrospect I wish I had known more and could have done more.

When I got back to Seattle there was a lot to do to complete the album. There were multiple versions of each song and Bob Flick and I listened to every take before choosing what we thought was the best one. Bob added some percussion and harmonica to a few songs and then we mixed the album. We chose an order for the songs, in this case six songs on each side for the LP. There were photos to take and artwork to finish. We delivered the completed master to the record company not long after Thanksgiving.

It's often challenging for me to remain motivated and to get myself to my desk to write songs during the holidays. Because I had continued to draw and to paint between Christmas and New Years that year I matted and framed what I thought were my best watercolor paintings. As an aside those paintings, a couple of them still hanging in my house thirty years later, continue to inspire as well as frustrate me. There is a level of an accomplishment about them that to this day I struggle to duplicate. Listening to the finished recording while surrounded by those framed paintings that was a good way to end that year.

There's a scene at the end of the Robert Redford movie *The Candidate* where after winning an election that he expected to lose Redford's character asks his campaign manager *what do I do now?* A part of me was asking similar questions as a new year began. There was something about finishing the album that felt like that should be enough. It was hard to come up with a business plan and figure out ways to try to sell the music and the record.

I booked concerts in Seattle and Spokane that corresponded with the album's release in June of 1982 rented the Moore Theater in Seattle and sold out the main floor and most of the balcony. The weeks leading up to the show I visited radio stations in Seattle and Portland and cities in between. By all measures the show was a success.

Spokane something else. I couldn't find a small theater to rent. The Opera House with 2700 seats was not that expensive. I'm not sure what I was thinking or even if I was

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thinking but I chose to put the show on there clearly biting off more than I could possibly chew. With a lot of help especially from my younger brother we sold nearly 700 tickets. There was a special moment when my two brothers as well as two friends joined me onstage and the five of us played our four string banjos like something out of the 1920's. It was something we'll never do again. The problem was that no matter how I looked at it I couldn't get over the fact that I was playing and singing to more than 2000 empty seats.

Life is full of lessons we keep learning and sometimes relearning and in a few cases relearning and relearning again and again. I certainly never tried to fill a hall that big again. Creating these chronicles I have thought more than once: *if I'd only known then what I know now*. Yet one thing I do know now is that I don't really want to know what's ahead ahead of time or know how life is going to work out or not work out with all the twists and the turns that we make or life makes for us.

In 1983 life certainly took some turns I never saw coming. Before we share those turns there are some people I would like you to meet.

II

*Sometimes my heart breaks and just has to cry
Sometimes my heart laughs and just has to fly
Sometimes my heart bursts for no reasons why
My heart is so full of love sometimes*

It's been said that if Mark Twain had written everything except *Huckleberry Finn* he would be considered a giant of American Literature. People also say if Twain had only written *Huckleberry Finn* the same would be true. That fact is he wrote it all and holds a unique place among American writers. I bring this up to help explain my relationship with my cousin, Joanne Pearson. If she was strictly a friend of fifty years with whom I share a love of sports, games, movies, and food her role in my life would be significant. If she were simply the person who helped me navigate and understand our family's stories, legends, and secrets and so made it possible for me to find my way through them and my place in them she would be a most important people in my life. The fact is that she is all those things and holds a unique place among family and friends.

We knew about one another growing up but we got to know each other when I was a senior in high school. She was five years older and had moved to Spokane to take a teaching job after graduating from Radcliffe, the only place at the time where a woman could get a Harvard education.

Joanne knew more about sports and could talk about them with more authority than anyone I had ever met. She had gone to school across the river from Fenway Park and the Boston Garden. That fall she came and she cheered me on at my football games. To a seventeen-year-old kid those are weighty credentials. The fact that she knew lots of good jokes and liked puns that was also in her favor.

We continue to talk about sports to this day though often with a nostalgia for those times before commercialization, revenue streams, and, yes, even ESPN. And in the end we always agree that these days are better than the old days simply because half the

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population, meaning women, can now choose to compete, learn teamwork, run as fast as they possibly can, throw a ball as hard as they want, and spend hours honing their athletic skills and at the same time be considered, well, normal. She and I also continue to enjoy bad puns and often complain about a dearth of good jokes.

Except for that first year we never lived in the same town. She became a child psychiatrist and moved back to Minnesota where she became a liaison between critically ill kids, their families, and the doctors who treated them. Because death was such a part of her life she would often come to Seattle for winter R&R. Through the years we found a special place for breakfast. We tried numerous steak houses. We spent hours competing at different games before finally settling on cribbage. There were movie marathons in the days before VCR's, DVD's and streaming videos. Our most successful was in 81 starting with a downtown matinee of *Absence of Malice* starring Paul Newman followed by *On Golden Pond* at a neighborhood cinema. Then we headed north for an art house film called *Heartland* before ending the day with *Chariots of Fire*.

Our relationship became something more beginning in 1969 when shockingly I learned my dad had been in a mental institution when I was born. It was something I could talk to Joanne about because she had professional training, some knowledge of the history of mental illness in our family, and was not afraid to talk about it and she was both family AND my friend.

Our dads were brothers who shared a truly unique relationship. Her dad, named Bror, which means brother in Swedish, was fourteen years older and a role model and father figure for my dad. When their oldest brother, Peter, died of pneumonia my dad was twelve and Bror at twenty-six became the family patriarch, a role their distant father had long ago abdicated. For countless reasons that likely included fear, guilt, shame, and various cultural stigmas the fact that Peter died in a mental institution remained untold and unshared and over time became a part a secret part of our family's story. When my dad was himself institutionalized at twenty-five it was Bror who became his ombudsman and greatest advocate. When dad was released shortly after I was born the two brothers practiced medicine together for five years as my dad recovered and completed his medical residency in Internal Medicine.

Each of them had an uncommon faith and belief in personal providence, Bror because he had survived a childhood infection that should have killed him, and my dad because he lived well and he prospered after the mental institution. Those two mighty branches of the family tree also shared an enthusiastic, optimistic view of the world.

Each was a force of nature and the two of them together formed a nearly impenetrable mythology weaving together an idealistic perception of the Pearson family wrapped around the American dream. I believe adding mental illness to their story would have meant for them that there was something wrong with the family. And yet because it could not be part of the story I struggled to make sense of how my dad could have ended up in a mental hospital, grappled with feelings I needed to be a secret keeper, wrestled to come to terms with my personal relationship with depression and anxiety and I ended up believing there was something wrong with me. I loved those two men. They would be horrified to think to that the legends and lore they believed in so wholeheartedly could end up biting someone they loved in the butt.

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All of these things became part of the journey of a lifetime leading me to one of those times in a life. A journey whose perilous turns in the summer of 1983 would take me to my cousin, to Joanne, my friend, and she who would be my guide.

III

*Sometimes I get weary I get weary some
Times I get weary of days to come
Sometimes my heart laughs sometimes it cries
Somehow I know love will survive*

Another person I would like to introduce you to is Pat Sands. For him life was a story he never got tired of telling and always found ways to embellish. I got to know him and a half a dozen of his friends in 1971 when McCoy and I were singing in Sun Valley. The story goes that McCoy met Sands a few years earlier when both were drinking at the Shire Tavern in Ellensburg. Someone came racing through the door to warn Sands that the quarterback of the college football team, convinced that Sands had been making inappropriate advances to his girl friend, was heading up the street with a dozen of his teammates looking for a fight. The tavern quickly emptied except for one guy who was drinking at the other end of the bar. After slowly finishing his drink he came up to Sands and said I've got your back. It was McCoy. As is often the case with Sands and his stories there's a happy ending. Because after the quarterback found him but before a fight could break out Sands talked his way out of trouble and McCoy into helping him buy a round of drinks for the house. From that day on Sands and McCoy were blood brothers without having had to shed a drop of blood. That is one of Sands many life stories.

Sands grew up in Seattle and had a network of friends starting with those he met in grade school. He was forever finding and making new friends and inviting them into an ever-expanding circle. He had gifts the best storytellers have in that he was interested in other people's stories and a very good listener. He had another gift that could upset those that cared him. Sands simply lived in and for the moment. When you were with him it was great because you knew there was nothing else he wanted to do and nowhere else he wanted to be. When you were waiting for him it could drive you crazy because he was often late and sometimes didn't even showed up. Yet when he finally did appear the world lit up. It was impossible to stay mad at him.

When Sands was around music and sports trivia games could start in an instant and go on for days. He carried his golf clubs, tennis racquet, and softball gear in his car just in case he drove by a golf course or playground. Everyone was welcome at his parents for St. Patrick's Day. Sands loved poetry and the theater. He would recite Shakespeare and lines of dialogue from *Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolfe*. "I will hold your hand when it's dark...I will tote your gin bottles out after midnight...but I will NOT light your cigarette. And that, as they say, is THAT."

He was working for a Seattle restaurant chain that had the concessions for the Oakland Coliseum the year the A's played the Dodgers in the World Series. He and three other guys get tickets to those games through the restaurant. Two were Dodgers fans and two were A's fans. They bet on everything including who could sing the National Anthem the loudest. Sands who could not carry a tune but loved to sing easily won the bet and the story goes he sang so loud the woman who was singing the anthem on the field turned toward him in horror and disbelief. Or at least that's the way the story's told.

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Sands' experiences with food were legendary like when he and a buddy were told they had eaten all they can eat at an all you can eat buffet after their 30th trip through the line. My all time favorite is when he and Jerry Gordon were coming back from a fishing trip deciding to stay awake by stopping at every exit between Vantage and Seattle and getting something to eat. They were sitting on a curb in Ellensburg eating ice cream when Sands old girlfriend walked by. "Is that you, Pat." He mumbled something before she finally walked away. When she finally left Gerry said why didn't you introduce me? Introduce you, look at you. Gordon swears he gained sixteen pounds and had to take his rings off because his fingers were swelling up like Ball Park Franks. I make Jerry tell me that story every time I see him.

In the early 80's Sands moved to Sequim on the Olympic Peninsula to manage a restaurant and a bar at a golf course with his brother. Then word got around that he was back in Seattle and that he had changed. He had become a Christian. What happened next really depends on who you talk to. Lots of people suddenly felt Sands who for so long had embraced them was now rejecting them. On the other hand Sands felt a need to put some distance between himself and his old life, to not put new wine in old wine skins as it were. The consensus seemed to be that Sands would soon be back to his old ways and life would soon return to the old days.

While personally I hadn't been to church in years I grew up going to church and I remain comfortable there. I told Sands I wanted to be part of his new life. Sure he said. Soon I was seeing him two or three times a week. There racquetball or a golf game with him and his friends from church, there was Bible Study. We often got together to just talk. We'd been good friends. We became better friends.

In early June in 83 he finished his internship at the church he'd joined. He was struggling with what to do when he returned from a trip he was about to take to Israel. He wanted to be a minister but wasn't sure about starting divinity school at 35 years old. He was tired of being poor. As he was getting ready to say goodbye I remember him looking up and saying, "You know sometimes I get weary." Those words hung there for the longest time. Then we got up, gave each other a hug, said I love you and said we'd get together as soon as he got home. I went back to my place and wrote a song called "Sometimes I Get Weary." It turned out well enough that McCoy and I sang it at a concert that next week. In fact a recording of that performance is providing the music for this Chronicle.

IV

*Sometimes my heart breaks and just has to cry
Sometimes my heart laughs and just has to fly
Sometimes my heart bursts for no reason why
My heart is so full of love sometimes*

Spring in Western Washington can be long and lush and filled with shades of abundant green, countless bursts of bloom and a subtle sweet scent of life awakening anew. The spring of 1983 was particularly gentle with days full of sunshine and little rain. I was able to run a little farther and train a little longer preparing for the 3rd annual Beaver Lake Triathlon. I was introduced to the Compline services at St. Mark's Cathedral and I remember those Sunday nights sitting bathed in that timeless music.

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The Brothers Four had a 25th Anniversary Concert at the Seattle Opera House. The guys' wives asked if I would help with a tribute. I set up a scholarship, got different public figures to write letters, and wrote a song for them that I sang before their first encore that night.

After fifteen years as a songwriter my songs were becoming more personal yet at the same time were getting more universal. I had developed a relationship and strong connection with a small Nashville publishing company who found something special in what I was doing. That made a difference knowing that when a song was finished they were waiting to listen to it and more often than not add it to their catalogue.

McCoy and I continued to develop our style of working together. I would get songs to a certain point and then we'd gather and with his incredible sense of timing and phrasing we would finish and polish them.

There was one difficult moment. After thinking about it for a long time I decided to talk with McCoy about his drinking. I'd never talked to someone about those kinds of things before. I decided to do it when I realized I would be talking to him because I cared because I loved him. One night when we were rehearsing I said, McCoy, I believe you have a problem and if you ever agree I'll go as far and as long as it takes to get to the other side. He thanked me. We went back to singing. While nothing happened at the time I believe moments like those have allowed us to continue to know each other better and trust each other more.

There is woman I had met and fallen in love with at the dinner party nearly four years earlier. While we didn't see each other much that spring but the week before the June concert we spent a day together on Whidbey Island. I remember seeing a group of watercolor painters with their easels scattered among rows of brightly blooming rhododendrons and imagining myself among them.

I also remember that toward the end of that day she and I checked out a romantic bed and breakfast and for reasons I've forgotten I decided it was best not to check in. The two of us walking towards the car instead of the room remains for me a moment forever suspended in time for while it's surely magical thinking a part of me may always wonder if at that instant I had said yes to her and so had been able to say yes to love that everything that was about to happen might not have needed to happen after all.

My heart is so full of love sometimes



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