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FINDING MY WAY HOME

I

Found and faced and freed my fears

Ones that haunted me for years

Brought me to my knees and tears

Finding my way home

That's the first verse of a song called "Finding My Way Home." There's a quote attributed to President Kennedy that says, "When written in Chinese the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One representing danger and the other opportunity." In the fall of 2001 I was in crisis. While I didn't know enough to call it that I did know enough to call and get professional help professional help. I began meeting regularly with a psychologist.

It's always been hard for me to ask for help, to admit that I'm hurting, to show weakness. I realize how important it is to be open and vulnerable as well as acknowledging how hard it can be to do that. The same is true for accepting responsibility for what I've done and who I've become.

That brings me to the opportunity or opportunities that came with the crisis. At fifty some years old I wouldn't necessarily choose to awaken ghosts that had found safe haven in my psyche or skeletons that have lived securely for so long in virtual closets behind locked doors. I wouldn't decide to challenge myths and legends and stories that I had grown up with. I wouldn't know how to dredge up and examine all the motivations and expectations buried and living in my unconscious mind. Yet somehow my dad's last gift had given me keys and opened doors and crashed through enough barriers until it became clear that not only was there an opportunity but also an obligation to explore, explain, and express all that had been set free and was now in motion.

II

Could not run I could not hide

Fears that would not be denied

Mattered not how hard I tried

Finding my way home

As I look back on 2002 I am amazed, amazed at how many things I had inside myself that got unearthed that year. A lot of them were perceptions I'd held onto since I was a kid. Then as I kept digging it became clear how effective voices inside me had been over the years at reinforcing those perceptions. It's a little scary to think I was in my 50's before I became truly conscious of all the chatter that I had been listening to for so many

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



years. On the other hand how much gratitude I feel to finally have a chance to understand where those voices came from and what they were actually saying.

One of the first things that come to light was how much time and energy I'd spent telling myself I was not very smart. The seeds of such an assessment aren't that hard to see once I started looking for them. As a kid I had trouble reading. As a result I didn't test well and struggled often unsuccessfully to be a C+ or a B- student. Dyslexia a likely culprit though growing up in the 50's I was never tested or diagnosed. It got more complicated because I grew up with two brothers who appeared to easily get A's and one brother going to medical school and the other to law school.

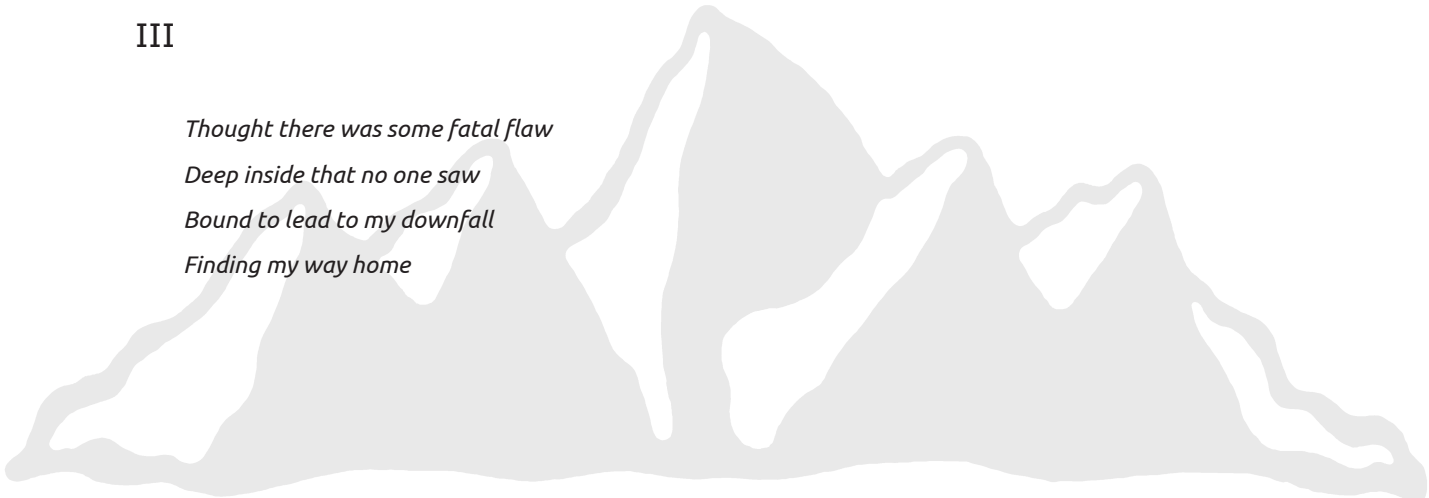
As a kid I wanted to make my dad proud and follow in his footsteps. He was a successful medical doctor who grew up in an immigrant family that put great value on a college degree. When I dropped out of the university my senior year to join the Brothers Four I wasn't thinking about any of that.

Then here I was years later in counseling finally admitting to myself that I couldn't have gotten into medical school. To this day I laughingly blame it on organic chemistry but it's more than that. And as I continued to talk I realized I was ashamed that I was the only one in my generation that hadn't gotten a college degree.

What a shame shame is and yet how cleansing it can be able to acknowledge and name it. Once I realized the hold it had on me I had some choices to make. If it was the degree that was important to me the answer was to back to college and graduate something I was now confident I could do. When I decided ultimately not to go back to college I promised myself that when I heard those voices that told me I was not smart I would listen with new and different ears, a new and different heart, and, yes, a new mind. Because I knew where they came from I could make them welcome and at the same time strip them of much of their former power.

After deciding I could live happily without a college degree my wife gave me a diploma. It says I have attained a "Masters degree in multi-disciplinary creative expression with a specialty in whole person learning and humanities." On one hand it's just a piece of paper. I liken it to the diploma the Wizard of Oz gave the Scarecrow when he arrived at the Emerald City longing for a brain. My diploma proudly hangs on my office wall as it has since June of 2002.

III



*Thought there was some fatal flaw
Deep inside that no one saw
Bound to lead to my downfall
Finding my way home*

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



Times of growth and self-discovery are not straight forward or even always forward. As a cowboy philosopher once said: remember, for every mile of road there's two miles of ditch. I ended up in one of those metaphorical ditches at my mom's 80th birthday party attended by lots of old family friends. One of them was a retired physician who decided to follow me around for an hour telling me how much weight he thought I'd gained since high school. By the time he was through I felt like I was in junior high, fat and dumb. Gosh, the things we tell ourselves!

By the summer of 2002 I'd spent a year starting most days writing my wife and then reading aloud to her whatever ended up on the page. I'd gotten to a place where the words flowed without thinking. One morning these words unconsciously appeared: This is not about my dad's depression it is about my depression, my anxiety, my lack of self-esteem.

Suddenly the words stopped flowing and tears took their place. I don't know how long I sat there sobbing before gathering myself and walking slowly upstairs to share what I had written accompanied by a new fountain of cleansing tears.

Somehow I had succeeded in going more than half a century without truly acknowledging my relationship with depression and maybe more significantly my feelings of anxiety. Why would it take so long for me to admit those things to myself? Lots of reasons, I suppose. I was ashamed, that word again, of that part of myself as well as afraid of it. Growing up those were things we simply didn't talk about as a family. I got good at faking it. I was able to define myself in ways that didn't have to include what might be considered the darker sides. Yet time and time again a darker side would find ways of defining who I was and my self-esteem would plummet. The world might not know but I would be petrified it might find out.

Part of me will always wonder if I would or could have chosen to consciously acknowledge such truths even to myself. Then that morning there they were in black and white and shared aloud. It did not take long to know that I couldn't go back to where things had been before those revelations and I also knew I did not want to go back though a part of me was terrified and didn't know how to proceed.

IV

*Afraid that I could not be loved
Always be that way because
Simply could not be not enough
Finding my way home*

Toward the end of the summer of 2002 my wife and I were about to move to the Olympic Peninsula. The Brothers Four would soon be leaving for a show in Austria and a few weeks

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later a month of concerts around Tokyo. Amidst the changes I met with the therapist for a mutually agreed upon last session.

"You need to write a new play," he said not long after familiar pleasantries had been exchanged. "You keep writing your old play time after time sometimes with a new cast but always using the same old story."

The way I remember what he said next was that I needed to find ways and reasons to have more faith and trust in myself and not forfeit that power or give it to other people. I don't remember exactly what more was said until we got to a place where we were about to say goodbye.

"What's your assignment?" he asked.

Without a moment's hesitation I leaned forward, I looked him in the eye, and I said confidently, "I'm going to re-write the play."

Then I remember the silence and the stillness and then it was like the room itself let out a great sigh.

He leaned forward and said slowly, "You will not be re-writing the old play, you will write a new play, a new play."

Not much more was said. The recognition that I needed to discard the old narrative and my now exposed reluctance to do just that said it all. It was time. I stood up, thanked him for everything and walked slowly toward the door and the future.

V

Heard me when I called out in the darkness

Came so I knew I was not alone

There for me when life was at its hardest

Thought that I would never make it home...

The Brothers Four performed in Austria in August of 2002. It was a magical trip. The promoter a successful businessman who had sung American folk songs during his student days, rediscovered The Brothers Four on the Internet, and decided to share our music with his village. Pat came. We were treated like a combination of royalty and family. We walked in the Alps during the day feasted in restaurants nestled in the valleys at night before singing to a sold out crowd in the picturesque village of Puchburg. By way of introduction our host told the story of an astronaut who described his visit to the moon as the trip of a lifetime. Tonight, our host happily said, with the help of The Brothers Four, I am going to the moon.

In September The Brothers Four did a month of concerts in the Tokyo area. And that meant staying most nights at the Capitol Tokyo, originally the Hilton, a boutique hotel near the Imperial Palace favored by entertainers through the years from the Beatles, Michael Jackson, The Three Tenors and, yes, The Brothers Four.

Around that same time the group began noticing a bit of resurgence in the

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US. In 2002 The Brothers Four were part of a PBS special called "This Land Is Your Land" featuring folk groups from the 60's. A few months later the movie "A Mighty Wind" came out and the country held its breath to see if Mitch and Mickey would kiss at the end of the rainbow first in the movie and then at the Oscars. The film was released a few weeks before the US invaded Iraq and as that war began to bog down a number of Baby Boomers reminded of Viet Nam and reaching the age of empty nesters saw folk music of the early 60's as a ticket to a simpler time and began spending entertainment dollars accordingly.

While music was a big part of my life growing up I never dreamed I would have a career in the business. One of the reasons was I never thought I was that good at it. I had little formal training couldn't hear or sing harmony parts often tensed up in recording studios and tended to never sing the same song the same way twice. What's that saying, if you can fake sincerity you've got it made? Well, I knew that I was sincere I just worried I was faking the rest of it. I even gave it a name, the Imposter Syndrome.

The Brothers Four was a good environment for me. We were as much a family as a business. The other guys liked me, trusted me, knew I was going to give my best at every show. The group became more businesslike when Terry Lauber replaced Dick Foley in 1991 but thanks to the Asian market my career kept going and over the years I learned to live with that nagging voice inside my head from time to time lifting its head and whispering: "imposter."

In Austria and then for that month in Japan I sensed something was going on with Terry. When we got back home I invited myself over to his house. I don't remember much of the conversation though I do remember he did most of the talking. I was in a raw place when I went in and felt more raw when I left.

It was only later that I realized what I heard Terry say though I doubt it was his intention what I heard was a voice other than my own calling me an imposter. While I might have spent my whole career letting the voice inside me put me down I'll be damned if I was going to let someone else do it. Humiliated yet strangely inspired I vowed to finally confront that interior chatterbox and in so doing discover and develop the limits, the possibilities, and the full range of my musical voice while doing all I could to remain unencumbered by the fear of failure or success. Okay, okay, maybe I didn't say all that as I got in the car and drove home that day but in some way I knew that I was turning the corner as I pulled out of the driveway.

VI

*Needed you that is for sure
'Cause of you I could explore
All my deepest fears and more
Finding my way home*

A laughing Kris Kristofferson once said he'd been told if he took the word "freedom" out of his songs he wouldn't have any songs. In the same vein I wonder about my songs and the word "home."

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By the fall of 2002 my wife and I had finished moving into our home on the Olympic Peninsula the first house as an adult that I could truly call my own. There was still a lot of work to do on the place, which was how I was how I was feeling about myself as well. A year earlier I'd unlocked and opened that long locked door to an unexplored room inside myself the key coming as a gift from my father three days after he died in the form of his words unexpectedly shared that liberated me from the needing to be a keeper of family secrets.

Opening that door had unleashed furies and fears that finally free would need to be faced. In facing them it was as if my internal life was playing out in a converse version of the Wizard of Oz my real life appearing in Technicolor while the interior landscape I was exploring coming alive in black and white and countless shades of gray.

Like that merry band who got their gifts when the curtain was drawn back at the Emerald City I received mine as I shined lights into what for so long had remained my darkest corners. The priceless gift of a simply framed diploma, the power at last to see and truthfully speak of my depression, anxiety, and self-esteem out loud and without shame, a sense that I not only must but could write my story anew, a new story, and finally a chance and a choice to call out those voices inside me that had often defined me and once called out and perhaps replaced by new voices helping reveal who I might be after all.

Clearly those gifts did not signify the end of the journey but instead were there to light the way forward. And more than once I wished the shoes I wore (as I explored) were ruby slippers that I could click together and so magically miss all the steps I knew I had left to take if I was going to finally find my way home.

*When those fears at last were free
Love had one more victory
Finally found and made my peace
Finding my way home*



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