



A Folksinger

It is something to look back on the last 50 years, to realize that one thing has remained constant: I am and I've always been a folk singer beginning in 1961 when I was a 14 year old kid starting at my 3rd school in 3 years searching for an identity. One way I found it was with a guitar or a banjo in my hands learning songs off folk records I would listen to for hours on a small record player in my bedroom. Its 3-inch speaker, it never made sense of the new stereo mixes. I would often stack the albums, listening to over an hour of non-stop folk music-on a turntable that could play 78, 45, 33 1/3, and 16 revolutions per minute. I don't remember records ever being commercially released at 16 but sometimes I slowed the 33 1/3 LP to 16 rpm to try to make sense, to unlock the mysteries of a banjo solo or a guitar lick, and lots nights I would fade off to sleep with the music playing sometimes awake enough to hear the record player turn itself off, other times falling asleep before the last song, and sometimes adding my unseasoned voice to the music that filled my bedroom.

I have a vivid memory of getting my first guitar. It's this guitar the one I'm holding now. It's a Silvertone. My folks went with me to Blessing and Tue Music in Spokane, the Southside of Downtown not far from the high school and it was a rainy weeknight. My dad had come home early so he could come. There were two student guitars hanging on the wall. One was blond and cost 20 bucks. The other was dark like this one and cost 15. My dad asked Norm Tue, "What's the difference between them?" The 20 dollar one is new, Norm Tue said. My dad said, "We'll take the one with experience." So off the wall it came. I wrapped it in a blanket and home we went.

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A missionary family was on a year's sabbatical then and attending our church. The wife, Helen Louise Landsverk, was my first teacher. In fact years later I was doing a show in Spokane and telling the story of how this missionary from India taught me to love curry and the guitar and a hand went up in the audience-and a woman said, "I'm Helen Louise now retired and living in Spokane." And so 40 years after the fact I had a chance to say a special thanks to her for showing me those first guitar chords.

Dedicating this song to her that night...

*This old guitar has been at times the only friend I knew
It could tell what I was feelin' if I was glad or mad or blue
When I had those feelings I felt I couldn't explain
I picked up this old guitar I listened to her play
Found a brand new love song in this old guitar of mine
Knows what I am feelin' and what my heart has in mind
Close your eyes and listen to what it took our love to find
A brand new love song in this old guitar of mine*

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After Helen Louise and her family returned to India I began taking banjo and guitar lessons from a fellow named Dutch Groshoff who would chain smoke menthol cigarettes and spend the first 15 minutes of most 30 minute lessons telling me what a great student my older brother was and though sometimes I would leave those lessons in tears I kept at it.

My first paying job was as part of a banjo band that included Dutch Groshoff's son, Larry, my older brother, Mike, both a couple years older, and Dan Eaton who was my age. We were both in 9th grade. We wore red striped vests that our mothers made and played songs like *Bye Bye Blues* and *Just Because* and *The World's Waiting for the Sunrise*. And the first job was at the Coeur D'Alene Hotel on Post Avenue in Downtown Spokane. We

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rode the service elevator with our banjos down to the bar, the smokiest room I have ever been in. We played our songs, rode the service elevator back to the lobby and standing outside in that fresh heady air Larry gave us each a three bucks.

That next year Dan Eaton and I, now both sophomores at Lewis and Clark High School, joined forces with a senior, Joe Allison, and formed our own folk group, taking our name from a movie marquee, The Castaways, and buying button down striped shirts to conform to the folk style of the day set by the group that made folk singing popular and even somehow hip, The Kingston Trio.

And suddenly I was a folk singer. And now 50 years later I still am.



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