



## All the Stages of My Life

### Introducing Mike McCoy

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I

*All the stages of my life you stood by me  
All the times I'd turn around and there'd you be  
Either hanging on for dear life or shaking your head in delight  
All the stages of my life you stood by me*

As I begin to share my life in songs and stories it feels important early on to introduce Mike McCoy because starting when we were eighteen he has always been my friend and often my singing partner. If I think of each stage or phase or chapter of my life as a separate disorganized shoebox filled with random snapshots every box would include pictures of one person laughing, clowning, posing, often acting a little silly and goofy and that would Mike McCoy.

That first shoebox, likely a 40-year-old orange one that once contained what are now considered vintage Nike running shoes, would have photos from the mid-sixties to the late-seventies. There would be pictures of two guys wrestling in the big room of the Fraternity and posing on ski slopes. There'd be pictures from Your All-American College talent show in 1968, snapshots of us singing in steakhouse lounges from Seattle to Sun Valley, as well as pictures from a musical highlight from those days, a 1978 concert at the Brentwood Playhouse in Los Angeles complete with a small Billboard Magazine review.

There'd be pictures of us at each other's weddings and at each other's apartments and the houses we rented during those years. Pictures of two guys in their twenties trying to make sense of the world and their place in it.

II

*There were times I thought for sure that we flyin'  
Other times I thought for sure that we'd die tryin'  
There were times that we spent fallin' other times we had a ball in  
There were times that I was sure that we were flying*

Snapshots of McCoy are prominent in my imaginary Birkenstock shoebox of photographs filled with pictures from 1980 to 1984 a time when I was trying to put my life back on track and in order after a divorce and no longer able to imagine what a solo career might look like.

I left The Brothers Four in the early 70's to explore a solo career, rejoined them for an extended Japanese tour in 79 giving me some needed money and confidence, but it wasn't until early 85 that I returned full time to the group. During the first five years of the 1980's my career was tethered, for better or worse, to Mike McCoy.



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



There are a lot of images of the two of us making music through those years. There are those first concerts at the converted church that was The Seattle Concert Theater. There are pictures of us recording the *Between Friends* album in 1981 in a studio full of great musicians and good friends. Pictures of us on stages in the Northwest in places like the Spokane Opera House and Meany Hall on the University of Washington campus. Some amazing moments preserved now in songs we recorded and images both black and white and Kodachrome still forever young in memories. They were times that wouldn't last in part because we couldn't make enough money to sustain them and maybe in part because we couldn't sustain them long enough to make enough money.

Whatever the reasons the friendship endured with the shoebox also full of images from the summer of 1981 when I helped McCoy build a log house on a lake in what was before the age of Microsoft the outer reaches of the east side of greater Seattle. One of those pictures would be of the two of us standing nose-to-nose trying to lift and fit two beams together the moment before it all came crashing down around us. We somehow survived, the house got built, and for the rest of the 80's on Memorial Day weekends there are pictures of many of us jumping into that lake on the first leg of what was the McCoy inspired Beaver Lake Triathlon an event that McCoy never lost.

And, yes, there must be images from June of 1983 when a dear friend of ours suddenly died. His the only coffin I ever carried in pouring rain making our way from hearse to grave remembering now McCoy breathing softly behind me. Indelible mages forever fixed.

### III

*Somehow we faced the music and survived  
Got to this stage still standin' side by side  
Whatever life is bringing we'll keep going we'll keep singing  
Somehow we faced the music and survived*

The shoebox that holds the photos from the 1990's would be from a pair of black Bostonian dress shoes, shoes I wore for fifteen years beginning in 1985 when The Brothers Four performed exclusively in tuxedos. In that box of photos would be a separate envelope and written on it in black marker it would say: Thanksgiving 1995 to Memorial Day 1997 the pictures in that envelope documenting the time that redefined in a most personal level my relationship with Mike McCoy.

In the late afternoon on the Monday after Thanksgiving in 1995 the phone rang. It was McCoy saying he needed to see me. It couldn't wait. A few hours later we were sitting at a roadhouse restaurant at the North end of Lake Washington sharing dinner and a vulnerability, an honesty, and an openness I have shared with very few people and never before with McCoy.



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



Beginning that night he trusted me to be part of the process of rebuilding his relationship with himself, his wife, his kids, and the world around him. In the 500 days that followed I don't remember a day when we didn't at least talk on the phone. Most of the calls were short. Things like: How ya doing? Need anything? Calls that always ended with I love you. We had gone thirty years and never said those words to each other and now no day went by without us saying them out loud to one another.

The pictures of Easter weekend of 1997 remain bitter sweet. There are the pictures of The Brothers Four playing to a sell out crowd in my hometown of Spokane, Washington on that Saturday night. It is the only time in my career I was the opening act as well as one of the headliners. There are pictures of McCoy joining me for a few songs during that first set. The next day McCoy and I, along with our wives, join my parents for an Easter service followed by brunch at my folks' house. They are the last images I have of my dad smiling and looking healthy. A few weeks later McCoy sat with the rest of my family at my dad's memorial at the church where we celebrated Easter a few weeks earlier. A lasting portrait in an imaginary envelope full of precious, priceless photographs.

#### IV

*Never thought that we would make it to this stage  
Find so much so discover at this age  
But the best may yet be waitin' we'll be singin' celebratin'  
Never thought that we would make it to this stage*

The imaginary shoebox holding pictures taken beginning when McCoy joined The Brothers Four in the spring of 2004 are from a pair of New Balance walking shoes complete with custom orthotics. Instead of photographs there are thumb drives containing digital images with different colored drives labeled by year with black Sharpie on masking tape.

Pictures of the first year document three legs of a season long bus tour The Brothers Four took performing with The Kingston Trio and Glenn Yarbrough as well as pictures of two trips the group took that year to make music in the Orient.

There is a lot of laughter and joy in those pictures. Pictures of the group performing and of McCoy and me putting on our daypacks getting ready to discover or explore some new town or city. One of the recurring images is that moment in each performance when I'm looking over at McCoy and filled with gratitude and on some level surprise that we are standing there together now.

Singing in The Brothers Four somehow gave new life and meaning to the music the two of us have made through the years. So there are now pictures of us recording twenty new original songs for what became *Between Old Friends*, recorded in the same building with the same band, same producer, same engineer, and many of the same friends who were part of *Between Friends* thirty years before.

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



MARK PEARSON  
MUSIC

Which brings us to this time. *One of Those Times in a Life* using what are the precious threads of the life and journey that Mike McCoy and I have made weaving them together now with other threads to create a yet to be discovered and yet to be created new tapestry knowing that whatever develops at the next stage that McCoy's smiling face is certain to be part of the picture.

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*All the stages of my life you stood by me  
All the disappointments and discoveries  
I don't know what's waitin' for us but I'll join you in the chorus  
All the stages of my life you stood by me*



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