



MARK PEARSON  
MUSIC

## Campfire 31: With Me Wherever I Go

I

*It's hard to imagine so hard to believe  
After coming this far one of us has to leave  
Whatever I do now or how hard I try  
I simply can't find any good in goodbye*

Those are the first few lines of "With Me Wherever I Go" a song I wrote for my cousin, Jane, in the spring of 1993. At the time she was in the middle of a fight of and for her life battling breast cancer a sneaky and insidious enemy.

She was six years younger than I. For years I knew her simply as my mom's sister's daughter. We became friends after her family moved to Northern Idaho when she was in junior high and I was in college. Our families would regularly get together for holidays. One year she and I ended up washing the dishes after Christmas dinner. We laughed all the way from wine glasses to greasy pans. When the last pot was safely on the drying rack we decided we needed to take a walk in the snow. By the time we returned an hour later a bond was formed and a tradition established. For the next twenty-five years whenever we were together we would find an excuse for at least a trek around the block.

Growing up in families that lived most comfortably on the surface with much unsaid we recognized in each other a desire to go deeper and understand more yet at the same time acknowledging an abiding love for and of that family. Without knowing it or articulating it we became each other's allies and fellow seekers.

Our search took on an added gravity and meaning when Jane was diagnosed with a particularly aggressive form of breast cancer in October of 1992. The previous June at her annual physical after giving her a clean bill of health the doctor told her that next year when she turned forty she should have a mammogram but until then continue self exams. A hundred and some days later Jane discovered a cancerous lump that was quickly removed along with her breast and a number of neighboring lymph nodes in which cancer cells were also found.

Jane is telling me this at dinner a week removed from surgery. I've driven from Seattle to Spokane where she is now living with her husband and two young kids. The conversation is a combination of clinical and unimaginable.

After ordering desert we decide we've had enough of this cancer conversation and we talk instead about a song I wrote a few years earlier for her daughter, Emily. When Emily was four Jane and her husband decided to adopt a baby boy. While awaiting the arrival of her brother something was disturbing young Emily. She finally confided to her grandfather that she was worried. About what, her grandfather asked? That after my brother comes there won't be a lap for me.

As scoops of ice cream begin to melt in front of us I take Jane's hand and sing the chorus of "A Lap for Emily."

*There will always be a lap for Emily.*

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

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*A place for you to go  
Where you will always know,  
You can laugh and cry,  
A love that never dies,  
There was always be a lap for Emily.*

Without having to say it out loud the song allows us to open the door to the idea that it may not be Jane's lap her children sit in as they grow up.

When that thought becomes unbearable I say "I have a book for you." I take a book out of paper sack that's on the floor. It's a picture book of the poem The Warning by Jenny Joseph. The poem would soon be ubiquitous but at that time Jane hadn't heard it. It begins "When I am old I shall wear purple with a red hat that doesn't go and doesn't suit me..."

When I finish reading we are both exhausted. It's time to go home. I can't remember now if I'd thought it out before I blurted it out but when we got up I said, "Jane, every Friday until you're healthy I'm going to write you a postcard and send it to you from wherever I am."

And so began the next stage of our journey

## II

*I want to be grateful for things that we've had  
But right now all I feel is angry and sad  
Acceptance is something that could come in time  
Till then there is one thing I cannot deny*

In 1993 I decide to record a solo album. While I'd been part of a number of Brothers Four recordings and had released "Between Friends" with Mike McCoy I'd never made an album of my own. At the time The Brothers Four were performing more than we had in years. I was selling some verses to American Greetings, doing occasional studio work for Bob Flick, performing a week here and a week there in lounges at various resorts as well as making regular trips to Nashville still trying to establish myself as a songwriter. AND at forty-five years old there was a part of me that wanted to stand on a concert stage, whatever size, and share songs that I'd written with the world.

Looking back it is easy to see all the ways and reasons I found to stop myself or slow myself down when it came to doing just that. There was the fear of success and the fear of failure. There was the fear that people might find out I was some kind of imposter. As a songwriter I was often self-conscious had trouble trusting

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



myself and simply writing freely as well as taking the time it took to polish a song so that it would shine. There was also an anxiety I felt when I entered a recording studio back then. It is hard to act naturally when you tense up when the red light goes on.

During the spring of 1993 I wrote what I called A Season of Songs. Except for a dozen Brothers Four dates in the Midwest I got up every morning and I worked on songs to sing and record. When the summer began I chose what I thought were the eight best new songs including With Me Wherever I Go that's part of this Chronicle as well as One of Those Times in a Life the title song of these campfires of this journey. And I also decided to record Dear Partner with McCoy, Heart of the Heartland with The Brothers Four. Six favorite songs I'd written over the previous ten years would complete the album. McCoy had been a significant part of a few of them like Magic Carpet and Part of the River. He would not be part of these new recordings as I tried to reclaim those songs to make them my own.

In order to keep costs down I did a voice and guitar album. Terry Lauber my singing partner in The Brothers Four added one additional instrument to each song. We recorded live. No overdubbing. Bob Flick produced and my friend, Reed Ruddy, engineered. 1994 was long after the golden age of vinyl and before compact discs had overwhelmingly become the new standard so we offered the music on a sixteen-song audiocassette.

At the time The Brothers Four had an office in downtown Seattle and one of the guys that worked there agreed to help me so I was represented by an entity called Attractions Northwest. We printed a single fold promotional sheet. We sent those sheets along with cassettes to different radio stations and booking agencies and then waited for the phone to start ringing.

### III

#### *Chorus*

*You'll always be part of my mind and my heart*

*Alive in me body and soul*

*Wherever you are we are never apart*

*You're with me wherever I go*

*Oh, you're with me wherever I go*

There's a Jimmy Buffett song called If the Phone Doesn't Ring It's Me. In the fall of 1993 I didn't know who they were but it's clear that a lot of people weren't picking up the phone and calling wanting to hear the new songs and buy the new album. There was a concert and an album release party at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle that October. We celebrated a lot that night. For sure the album and the music. More importantly Jane and her family come over and we celebrated

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



the fact that the doctors have told them that after surgery, chemo, and radiation that Jane was now cancer free. It appears that modern medicine combined with lots of love has done the trick.

A few weeks after the album release party The Brothers Four did a west coast tour of eleven cities. The group sang on a Wednesday night in Prineville, Oregon. We had a day off before a Friday concert in Idaho Falls. On Thursday we drove to Twin Falls, Idaho and stayed at a quaint one story 50's style motel called the Apollo Inn. There is a steak house next door called Rock Creek. Because we're usually at performance halls by 5:30 the group seldom has dinner together. That night we did. The fact that our manager picked up the bill made the experience all the sweeter.

The next morning, Friday, I went to the motel office where there was a rotating wire rack of picture postcards in the corner. I bought one with a picture of the twin falls. I wrote a few forgettable lines to Jane and put on one of the post cards stamps that I carried in my wallet at that time. I can close my eyes today and see the front desk that is worn smooth from over fifty years of transactions and remember how the man behind that desk told me to put the post card in the basket and that it would be posted that afternoon. I do as he says turn open the glass door and walk toward the car and a new day.

The tour finished that next Wednesday in Delta, Colorado. We're traveling in two rental vehicles. I volunteer to drive one of them back to Seattle. Our road manager will drive the other. On Thursday morning after dropping the other three guys off at the Salt Lake City airport he and I decide we would like to spend the night in Twin Falls in fact stay at the Apollo Inn and have another dinner at Rock Creek. Which we do.

When I get back to my hotel room after dinner that night the message light is lit. I can't remember now who the messenger was but the message is clear: Jane's cancer has reappeared as a cluster of tumors on her neck. And the doctors say there is nothing more to do but prepare for the end. I remember putting the phone back in its cradle sitting on the side of the bed and simply letting the tears flow.

The cruelest irony is the next morning, Friday, walking into that same hotel office that I'd been in only once before last Friday. One week earlier. Returning to that same wire postcard rack picking out another postcard having no idea what to write. I tell Jane as much in a few short sentences before putting that postcard into that same basket on that same worn counter with that same smiling face behind it assuring me the card will be posted that afternoon.

Everything the same. Everything changed.

#### IV

*But I know the times that we have shared together  
Are going to be part of this life forever  
My love's never changing I always care  
And in my heart I know you'll always be there*

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



When the cancer returned Jane returned to Coeur D'Alene the place she had lived the longest and the best. I came home, she eloquently said, to fight like crazy to live and to prepare to die. She put candles in a window and her many friends knew that when she was feeling up to company the candles would be lit and people were more than welcome to come by. Many of those same friends each decorated a cloth square. They took those squares and sewed them into a quilt that Jane would wrap herself in when she was feeling chilled or lonely. At Christmas that year she and I sat together with the tape recorder running and walked and talked through some of her life.

The last day of January The Brothers Four returned to the road. This time the schedule was thirty-one shows in forty-two days beginning in Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin and finishing up in Athens, Texas. Though we slept in hotels we traveled in a motor home. What that meant was that the four of us along with our road manager, who was also our driver and soundman would travel in a single vehicle.

We quickly established places in the motor home. Terry rode shotgun. John sat on the couch. Bob's spot was the overstuffed chair. I am the only one with a laptop computer so I stake out a place at the kitchen table. Every morning I sit at that table open up the laptop and start typing free and easy. There are greeting card verses to write. I am working on the story of my parents' lives that I plan to give them on their 50th anniversary in the coming June. I am also trying to put Jane's life into some kind of words.

The Friday postcards to her weave a wavy jagged line across the country. Wisconsin Rapids, Olney, IL, Baltimore, MD, Hamlet, NC, Garden City, KS, Claremore, OK. On Wednesday, March 16th, an off day with two concerts left in the tour we drive from Harrisville, MO to McAlester, OK where I get a message to call home. And the message is that Jane was told she had two weeks. News we were expecting but could not prepare for.

After checking with the other guys I call Jane and tell her there wouldn't be a problem canceling the last two dates of the tour and that I could be with her the next day. The truth, she says, is I'm kind of busy so if you could come in a week that would be best.

Is there anything I can do before I see? I ask.

Well I want you to sing A Lap For Emily at my memorial. Last night, she continued, I was talking to my son Kristofer and I told him that whenever he looks up into the night sky and sees the brightest star that he will know that's me looking down on him. I would like you to make that thought into a song for Kristofer and sing it at my memorial.

Uh...uh...well...I'll do my best.

Promise?

Promise.

Love you.

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



Love you.

I hang up the phone pick up the guitar and wonder what I have gotten myself into now.

V

*You'll always be part of my mind and my heart*

*Alive in me body and soul*

*Wherever you are we are never apart*

*You're with me wherever I go*

*Oh, you're with me wherever I go*

The red buds are blooming in Mt. Pleasant, Texas on Friday March 18th the last day of the tour. In the postcard that I send to Jane, the last one I will send, I tell Jane I will see her in a few days. The next morning the group stops at the Dallas train station to ship the sound gear home. Dealey Plaza is only a few blocks away. I walk to that haunted hallowed killing place where a bullet struck a President's head and broke a country's heart.

Sunday is my birthday. On Tuesday I drive to Coeur D'Alene. Jane is lying on the couch when I arrive. She is jaundiced and distended. I take a moment and hold her. She nods when I ask if she is ready to hear Kristofer's song and I take my guitar out of its case adjust the tuning clear my throat and begin to sing what amounts to a dying mother's message to her son:

The time has come for me to go

*It's written in the stars*

*I won't be far away, you know*

*For wherever you are*

*Chorus*

*When you sit beside your window*

*Look out into the night*

*You'll see me shining down on you*

*The brightest star up in the sky*

And then another verse and chorus, a bridge and final chorus. When I finish I wipe away both her tears and mine. She is smiling. And slowly the day melts softly away. Singing, talking, lots of quiet sitting, Jane lying either on the couch or in her bed.

Because I've been on the road most of the winter and because Pat's daughter, Lindsey, is starring in the high school musical, West Side Story with opening night two days away my plan is to say goodbye to Jane at the end of this day stay with my folks in Spokane that night return to Seattle then come back to Coeur D'Alene for

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



the Jane's memorial. When I wake up at my folk's house the next morning I don't have any premonitions but I do have a strong need to say goodbye one more time to Jane. When I arrive at her front door just before 9 AM the look on her brother's face says it all. She died in her bed a few minutes earlier.

After a few confusing moments of tears and hugs a sort of unexpected miracle happens. I tell Jane's dad I would like to go into Jane's bedroom and sit next to her and say goodbye by singing a few songs.

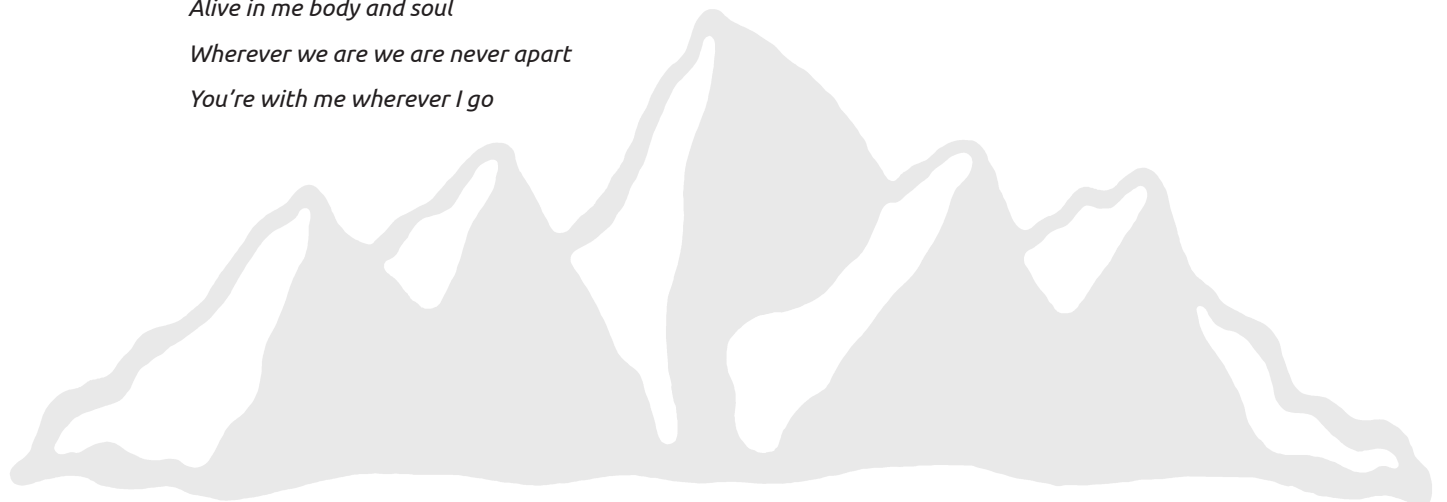
"Everyone, come," my uncle shouts, "we are going to sing some songs to Jane." Soon we, a dozen family and friends, are gathered around her bed singing and praying and speaking and crying encircling her holding each other in a timeless precious magical ring.

The next night I am in Seattle watching Lindsey triumphant in West Side Story. On Sunday back in Coeur D'Alene. On Monday we celebrate Jane's life first at a family graveside service and then at a public memorial. I am able to keep my promise to Jane singing songs for both her daughter and her son. I also share something Jane wrote to me after planting tulip bulbs with Emily the previous November:

*We planted bulbs, my daughter and I. She arranged them with deliberate and delicate surprise, saying I must wait till Spring to see what she did. I told her I would hope to wait & hope to see...and still should I not be there to eagerly peer at the gifts she gave, she will know me to be in the raking, the digging, the planting, the burying, the blanketing, and the final burst of beautiful bloom. That is the way of all things.*

*To which I say AMEN.*

*Wherever you are we are never apart  
You're with me wherever I go  
Oh, you're with me wherever I go  
You'll always be part of my heart  
Alive in me body and soul  
Wherever we are we are never apart  
You're with me wherever I go*



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