



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

MOMENT OF TRUTH

I

*Outside it's rainin' like crazy café dark and almost empty
Soon as you sit down we both see oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth
From the first words that are spoken something magically unfoldin'
Exposed and completely open oh, oh, oh, a Moment of Truth*

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Those are the first two verses of a song called Moment of Truth from McCoy's and my recording, *Between Old Friends*. The song is referring to the night of Monday, November 27, 1995. There'd been phone calls from both Connie and McCoy over the Thanksgiving holiday culminating with one from McCoy Monday morning saying he needed to see me. It was clear from that clipped cryptic conversation that something was wrong.

In the hours before we met I sat down and wrote down a few thoughts to share with McCoy. I can't remember exactly what those words were but what they said was whatever's going on you're not alone and however long it takes to get through whatever this is is be how long we will take. Years later that promise was put into a song that is also a part of the *Between Old Friends* album with a chorus that goes:

*For as long as it takes I will be by your side
For whatever awaits in the morning light
This promise I make that with you I shall stay
Stay alert and awake for as long as it takes*

McCoy and I arranged to meet at 4:30 at a Roadhouse Restaurant on the North end of Lake Washington. Paraphrasing Yogi Berra it gets late early that time of year and as that great American novelist, Snoopy the Beagle, says at the beginning of every one of his stories, it was a dark and stormy night. McCoy and I had our choice of tables. We took one at the far corner of the restaurant at the end of a row of windows that during the day looked out onto the lake though at the moment simply reflected the darkness.

We sat across from each other sipping water and devouring dinner rolls. The waitress came took our order. I read what I'd written to him earlier that day. He took a deep breath before nodding and saying "thanks." Then he started talking, in ways I'd never heard him talk before.

Moses in the Bible has always fascinated me. Abandoned at birth. Found by Egyptian royalty. Raised to lead and govern he righteously murders someone and is forced into exile. Years later now a simple shepherd he is beckoned by a burning

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bush. Those flames claiming to be God tell him that he, Moses, has been chosen to lead the Israeli people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Hardly able to keep from laughing at the absurdity of such a request Moses suddenly realizes this bush is actually serious. He tells that smoldering shrub that at one time he might have had the confidence and all the tools to lead such an undertaking but now he, Moses, was a simple shepherd and he didn't have "it" anymore. To which the bush replies, "At last you're ready. You're finally the person I need you to be."

The McCoy I'd known for thirty years, charismatic, cocky, and devil may care now literally and figuratively brought to his knees. As he talked I was overwhelmed with what a gift I was receiving as he shared such a moment with me. McCoy and I along with a lot of other guys grew up learning how to compartmentalize, rationalize, that at an early age big boys don't cry and tears and sweat are often seen as signs of weakness. For thirty years McCoy's and my relationship had been unconsciously informed and governed by such a code. Beginning on this night the code would apply to us no longer.

II

*Clearly this night is containin' something that defies explainin'
Both can feel life's 'bout to change in oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth*

*As that truth comes pouring out demons being freed somehow
Power to haunt you gone for now oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth*

The next day I checked in with McCoy by phone. As we got ready to hang up McCoy said, "I love you." My bumbling stumbling reply was "I love you, too." In the previous 30 years I don't remember if we ever said I love you out loud to each other. For the next year and a half we would talk nearly every day. The conversations were seldom long or significant. They always ended with both of us saying "I love you." Though we don't talk as much these days, the conversations we do have still do.

It is my belief the most important thing we can give to someone else is to be an active attentive witness in their lives. Those times when they're on some personal quest we can also figuratively light a candle for them and again metaphorically place it in the window. In other words leave the light on for them. Those things can take a lot of different forms. For me it often means thinking about that person and putting those thoughts into songs and stories. That's what I did the month of December that year for Coy and Connie. By Christmas it had become a book that I shared with them just before the New Year. The book was entitled A Christmas Love Story featuring a song of the same title that begins:

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*When the whole world was covered with darkness
When all that we knew was the night
When all appeared useless and hopeless
That's when we first saw the light*

*It's a light that began as a promise
And then it appeared as a star
And as it shown brightly upon us
It led us to where we now are
Chorus*

*Just when the world was the darkest
That's when that bright light appeared
Part of the Christmas love story
That's lasted for two thousand years*

The book also describes our dinner.

On Monday, November 27th, the world in which I lived shifted. Mike McCoy told me in plain, simple language that he needed me. I have never known him to admit that he needed anyone before. For the first time that I can remember he cried. This man who kept so much inside himself let himself pour out and run down his cheeks. As two grown men we publicly reached across the table where we were seated and touched one another, holding on for dear life.

We talked about human failings. We shared pain, remorse, anguish. We struggled to understand why we do the things we do. We wondered how and why those we love the most we hurt the worst. There was resolve by McCoy to find out who lives in the darkest corners of his being. He told me how much he loved Connie.

It was one of the most compelling, culminating conversations of my life. Why? Because it was as close to the bone as it was to the heart and soul. Because in the thirty years of my adulthood I have never known anyone who appears so close to having it all coming so close to losing everything. A brighter light shines from him. The shadows are darker in him. In the light and in that darkness were commitment, betrayal, self-love, loathing, fear of a fatal flaw, friendship, the possibilities of redemption.

It was a conversation and a moment we could not have had in our 20's or our 30's. One we did not have in our early 40's. When we left to go our own ways I sensed

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for the first time that McCoy could be a whole person. He could in time accept himself and so accept the love of others. Love others.

As he drove off alone into an unknown world I knew there was faith as well as fear, hope as well as horror, and truly there was love. I knew that he was ready and able to face whatever the journey demanded. I also knew I would be there as long as he needed me to be.

After nearly twenty years the memories remain fresh. One of the songs in the book talks about McCoy discovering his faith. It starts:

*I never thought I'd be someone
To get down on my knees
As far as help I needed none
But now I'm asking please
Too many times I've tempted fate
More than one man's allowed
I know that I'm a little late
But, God, I'm asking now*

McCoy has always been more comfortable driving than riding. "The Magic Carpet" a song about an old Chevrolet is one of the most important songs in our repertoire. In that song McCoy's behind the wheel. That December I wrote the verse and chorus of a sequel:

*I'm the only one whose put some miles on this old Chevrolet
If I felt boxed in or was feeling wild I would simply drive away
Taken me safely through many a storm she has been my pride and joy
She's kept me dry she's kept me warm my treasure and my toy
Chorus
Take the keys and take the wheel
Give her some gas see how she feels
You know where the road and the rubber meets
The world looks different from the driver seat
It was something I never planned
To put my life in someone else's hands*

As well as the songs there was a story about what McCoy was facing, about what I believe we all must face if we are to truly know ourselves:

The story is everyone's and ours alone. We plant and build a life next to a deep, dark forest. The forest may be haunted and may haunt us although we try to deny

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or dismiss that fact. We wake up some mornings and there are tracks leading from and to the woods. We look for damage. Most often find none. At night we hear sounds from the forest. Haunting wails. Moans. Siren calls. We tentatively look from the edge of that black woods as far as we can into its heart. We walk in a ways. We build paths some ways into the woods.

Then one morning we wake up and everything we have planted and built is destroyed. The tracks of the intruder lead back into the trees.

Often times in such stories we rebuild there on the spot. We believe, or try to, that it was simply an accident. We may build higher fences or better warning devices. We may set traps. We may cut the forest back, trying to turn more and more of that primeval woods into tamed land. We do everything we can to keep that forest out of our world.

Still the forest moans. Still tracks are found crossing our yard in the morning. We hide our fear with work. We continue to deny the power of the woods that is bordering our lives. And then one night we are awakened by a crashing, crushing sounds. Someone is inside our house. We scream and look and find only the signs of someone who has invaded our lives again.

The moment of truth has arrived. We can deny it no longer. It is time to enter the forest. It is time to find out who the intruder is. It is time to go in search of all that haunts us and daunts us appears to taunt us.

If we are lucky there is someone who will wait for us in the clearing as we enter the forest. A great love of our lives. There is great fear that they may not be waiting when we return. We wonder if any love can survive such a forest, such a time as this.

There also may be someone else who enters the woods with us. A friend of long standing. It is a journey into darkness. It's a journey for the light.

Although it is hard to tell night from day, we stop from time to time to try to rest and decide where it is we are. We build fires to keep the beasts at bay. We tell stories of our youth and of bravery. We laugh. We try to think that we can continue to find our way into the woods. That we may in time find our way out of them. One night, by one fire, something says the day of reckoning is near. There is not much further to go. We also know, at that moment, that the last of the way we must go alone. We say good-bye to our friend at that place.

"I will see you back home."

Or so we say, not sure if we will see home again. We walk onward. It is only at this point of searching for the beast, tracking the demons, that we realize they are us. It is the dark side of our own soul that we visit.

It strikes us like an epiphany. We are overcome with anger and sympathy. Why didn't we see that sooner? How did we become involved in this death struggle--with ourselves?

We know we are walking in a time of magic. Mysterious. It's mystical. Few have gone into the woods. Fewer have gone this far. Fewer yet have found this moment of culmination and confrontation. We know that we are walking on ground that

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few have walked treading now on sacred soil. For a moment we see clearly in the darkness. For a moment life is lit by an intense flame. We realize that it is in our power to free the demons in this dark place in the forest. For one moment we are simply not afraid. We do not know how but we know the enchantment is broken, and we are free. Could it be that we have touched a face of God?

The demons cannot be slain. The beasts cannot be tamed. We smile and lick the salt of our tears. For a moment all is clear. All is pure. All is sure. And then is gone. Once again it is just a forest, and we wonder what we have done and where we have been and what we have seen. Some may choose to stay here. Some may choose to deny all that they have felt and known and sensed. Some may try to explain it.

We stumble through the forest in search of our way home. The forest that took so long to enter takes only a short time to leave. And there, on the edge of that forest, our life awaits. On the edge of the forest we take one long look into the woods. We stand and stare in awe and wonder back from where we came. What did we experience in the heart of that deep dark woods? And then we walk slowly and surely into the light of our life. The world looks so much the way we left it. Only everything has changed. We will know in time about all that is new and renewed. We begin to run. Love is waiting.

It is something to look at these songs and stories years later and to realize the journey McCoy has made the man he has become.

III

*For the moment life's suspended between what we're sure has ended
And what we will learn's intended oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth*

*Cafe closes we start leavin' not sure where this moment's leadin'
Both of us somehow believin' oh, oh, oh this moment of truth*

In my experience people who are most successful at turning their lives around are those who add a spiritual element to it, one that often includes large leap of faith preceded and followed by countless little steps that add up to walking the walk day after day. For McCoy his leap meant dropping to his knees. By the time he got back up his commitment to living as a man of God was complete.

One of the many steps McCoy took that first year was being baptized in the waters of Lake Sammamish. That day I watched him disappear then reappear sputtering and smiling. It reminded me of how Pat Sands early on in his walk of faith was on a fall retreat in the Cascades when he told Milt Jones he was ready to be baptized. Milt's said when we get back to Seattle we'll do that. No, Sands replied, I mean now.

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So the two of them shuffled down a hill to an ice-cold creek found a place deep enough where Sands could be immersed and that was that.

Sands and McCoy, two of the wildest guys my mom ever met. So wild she used to pray I would find some good “Christian” friends to hang out with. Little did she know the paths those two men would walk.

Another step McCoy took early that first year was when he visited his mom he asked probing questions about family and the past. For McCoy who was trying to figure out where he was going it was way of trying to understand better where he came from. As he got to the door to leave that day he turned around and told his mom he loved her. It was something she hadn’t heard very often from him. After a moment she said Mike, I love you, too. There was pause then she added, “Haven’t always liked you.” Leave it to Judy McCoy to get the last word.

There are moments of truth in people’s lives, in the lives of families, countries. How we define those moments and how we let those moments define us can give meaning and understanding to the world we live in and our place in it. Each year, on the Monday after Thanksgiving, Mike McCoy and I get together to have dinner and to remember a most important moment in his life. A moment when he came close to losing everything. By the grace of God he found his wings. And learned to fly.

Cafe closes we start leavin’ not sure where this moment’s leadin’

Both of us somehow believin’ oh, oh, oh this moment of truth

Oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth

Oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth

Oh, oh, oh a Moment of Truth



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