



MARK PEARSON
MUSIC

WHAT I WAS MOST AFRAID OF

I

*For years I tried to understand my dad's last gift to me
At the same time find and face my fears and then to set them free
It was when those fears were running wild that I could finally tell
What I was most afraid of...turned out to be myself*

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That's the first verse of a song called "What I Was Most Afraid Of." The song begins with the line "For years I tried to understand my dad's last gift to me." That gift came in May of 1997 at my dad's memorial three days after he died when his minister and friend, Don Gilmore, read from my dad's writings about his stay in a mental institution fifty years earlier a time coinciding with my birth. As he was reading Don didn't know he was revealing what had been a long held family secret, in some ways dark and shameful. The truth is my dad had recovered so successfully I didn't learn about his hospitalization until I was 22, how serious it had been until I was 36, then fourteen years later in my dad's own words at this most private-public moment without any prompting from any of the secret keepers the secret was a secret no longer.

So what would the gift be in that? For me I might describe it as living in a house for half a century and every room is accessible except for what's behind one locked door. In that house the walls as well as the people who live there can and do talk including the walls in the room behind the locked door. At the same time the locked door and all that's behind it is treated as if it doesn't exist. Then one day without explanation a key appears as well as permission to unlock the door and explore all that's behind it and perhaps in the process to finally explain and understand all the creaking noises and sounds that for so long have been part of that amazing dwelling.

But first there would be a year of grieving the loss of my dad and better understanding his legacy and on the first anniversary of his death staging a musical memoir, Season of the Heart, celebrating his life introducing nearly 40 new songs. The next two years would include almost two hundred shows by The Brothers Four. Those performances the audiences' responses to them and the money earned from them helped me with a confidence I had often struggled with. It also helped make it possible to buy my first house and the resources for my wife and I to make it our own.

During those years I often sat at desks in hotel rooms and kitchen tables of tour buses in front of a laptop computer struggling mightily to explain my dad's last gift. I had settled early on a title: "Learning My ABC's, One Man's Search for Authenticity, Belonging, and Confidence." In the winter of 2001 with touring curtailed I committed to taking the hundreds of pages of ideas and notes and random thoughts and by the end of that May creating a coherent narrative to share with family and friends on what would be the fourth anniversary of my father's death followed a day later by my mother's 79th birthday.

The story traced five pathways leading to my father's death and the sharing of the

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secret. "Authenticity" told the story of my relationship with my dad and "Belonging" my relationship with my older brother while "Confidence" described my relationship with myself. Between those familial relationships I placed one I had with my longtime friend and singing partner, Mike McCoy, and another to my connection to The Brothers Four.

Then those five individual pathways became suddenly a five-pointed lodestar star that led me from Seattle where I lived to Spokane where I was born. And as that physical journey closes in on its final miles and the five pathways become one the words turn poetic:

There may be no mountain more beautiful than the human form, no forest more primeval than the human spirit, no ocean more majestic than the human mind, no sunset more spectacular than a human soul, no flower more fabulous than the human heart.

I look out the window at the familiar landscape and back at a journey for truth, for home, and to find myself. It is a journey that has somehow taken me to the summit of some improbable peak. Step by step I have blazed a trail of words up that mountain's face and so begun to face my greatest hopes and deepest fears. I have seen where I have come from and those who have come before. I have stood in awe and wonder, planted my symbolic flag, and then follow those same words back to the valley, home. Where I live. Where I must live.

Language has shined a light into what was once forbidden and foreboding darkness, illuminating not a world to fear but to make welcome. A world not of guarantees but of possibilities. I stop singing. The world is suddenly silent. The sun is shining. No words are necessary. Anything is possible.

II

*By that I mean that I believed that I was not enough
There was something wrong with me and I could not be loved
I saw when I shined a light where darkness long had dwelt
What I was most afraid of...turned out to be myself*

The last week of May in 2001 Learning My ABC's was ready to be shared with the world. In this case a world made up of a small group of family and friends that included my wife, her two daughters, my mom, cousin Joanne, McCoy and a few others who would receive a copy of the 229 page manuscript along with what I called a Reader's Guide both of which had been copied, printed and bound at Kinko's.

What I hoped and believed as I made the drive to Spokane to celebrate my dad's dying day and my mother's birthday was that four years after receiving my dad's last gift, no longer obligated to be a keeper of family secrets, and after spending so much time thinking about and creating my personal ABC book that that journey was about to end and I would be able to finally and fully graft on all I'd learned since my dad's death to all the stories I

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had grown up with and had been telling myself for so many years. It would soon become clear that this was far from the end of the story.

III

The road is long in search of truth and home

Filled with much we do not know we know

I ran and hid until I was compelled

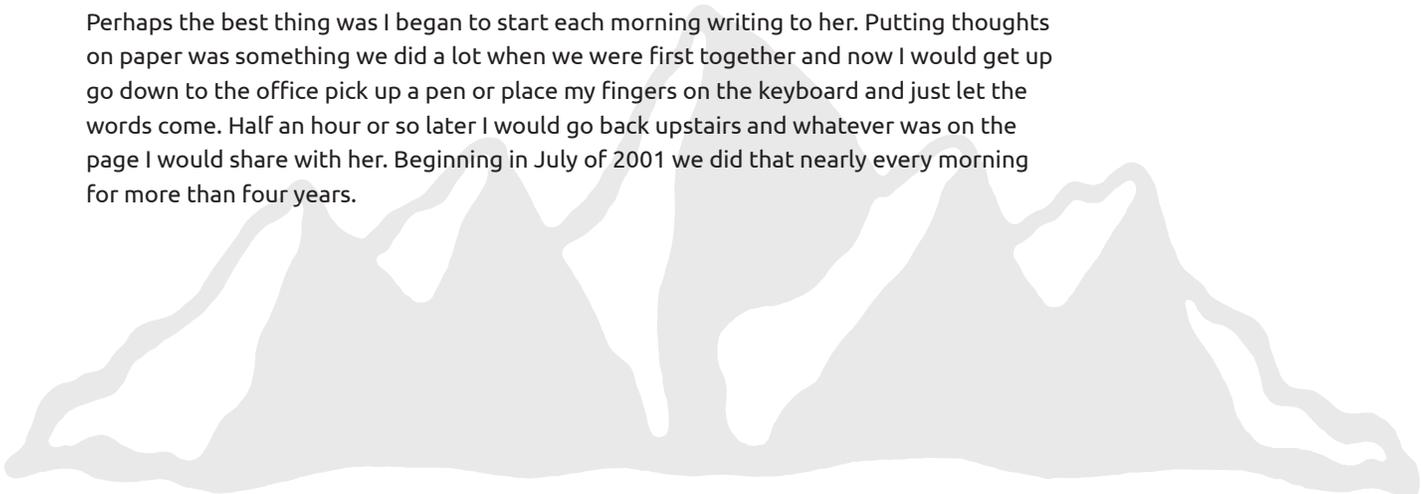
To face my deepest fears and find myself

When I try to describe how I was feeling after delivering the last ABC book to family and friends I'm reminded of the comedy horror movie from 1984 called Gremlins. At the beginning of that film a father as a unique Christmas present for his son brings home a cuddly character sitting sweetly in the dark corner of a not so large box. The gift comes with a warning. Do not feed your furry friend after midnight, keep him away from water, and do not under any circumstances expose him to the light. Of course in the course of the movie all these things happen, the sweet snuggly sidekick spawns monsters that multiply and a fight for survival begins.

For me everything that had been so long in the darkness of that locked room was now exposed to the light thirst quenched and well fed morphing into fears that were now racing around in my head (and heart) doing their best to frighten me often quite successfully.

One of the challenges was what to do next. What to do now. It was made more difficult because at the time I didn't know or wasn't sure what was even happening. Coincidentally and a bit unfortunately my moment of deconstructing corresponded with a time when my wife was having an amazing growth spurt that included lots of kudos at her job. Just as she was soaring professionally and personally I was becoming more insecure and needy. In retrospect it is just all so human but also a little humiliating. Fortunately I kept reaching out to her though my efforts could sometimes be described as painful, pitiful, and a little pathetic.

Perhaps the best thing was I began to start each morning writing to her. Putting thoughts on paper was something we did a lot when we were first together and now I would get up go down to the office pick up a pen or place my fingers on the keyboard and just let the words come. Half an hour or so later I would go back upstairs and whatever was on the page I would share with her. Beginning in July of 2001 we did that nearly every morning for more than four years.



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IV

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The Brothers Four were scheduled to perform in Japan beginning on Friday, September 14, 2001. Everything changed the previous Tuesday morning when as Alan Jackson would so eloquently describe in song, the world stopped turning. I was awakened early on September 11th by a phone call from a friend telling me to turn on the TV. If Kennedy's assassination in November of 1963 was the first time we sat united as a nation around our televisions September 11th and its aftermath might be described as the last. It would not be long after that catastrophic event we began communicating via Facebook and Twitter and a myriad of other social media and getting our facts not from a few trusted talking heads but from rival 24 hour news organizations offering views as much as news.

By the time my wife and I began watching TV that morning the first Tower had fallen followed quickly by the second followed by endless replays of the Twin Towers turning into what became known as the Pile and Ground Zero narrated in large part on CNN by former local Northwest news anchor, Aaron Brown, reporting the biggest story of his career on his first morning of his new job.

One thing that stands out about that day and the ones that followed was how quiet everything became. It was like we were all talking in whispers. At the end of the second day my wife and I took an early evening walk around Greenlake joined by countless others drawn together by a strong need to be together somehow. There were no sounds of people at play. I remember hearing footfalls more than voices as well as noticing the unnaturally empty sky.

A few days later The Brothers Four walked the eerily empty corridors of SeaTac airport before boarding a near empty airplane on the first day of the resumption of international flights served on our way across the Pacific by flight attendants clearly aware of how many of their cohorts had perished days earlier simply doing their jobs.

Because of the International Dateline the night before in America is the morning after in Japan. So it was after breakfast on September 21st in Tokyo we watched George W. Bush declare War on Terrorism the evening of September 20th in America. The next morning we watched the next night's Tribute to the Heroes featuring the likes of Springsteen, U2, Tom Petty, Billy Joel, Paul Simon. As much as the music I remember the candles.

On that tour The Brothers Four were singing at Blue Note Jazz clubs and every night we sang to grateful Japanese audiences who did everything they could to offer comfort and show concern. Because some of the musicians from the East Coast scheduled to perform were either having trouble getting to Japan or did not want to travel the group was offered an extra week of work. For one of the few times in our career we said no instead of yes. The uncertainty and anxiety were just too much to want to be that far away from home for any longer than we had to be.

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Perhaps the most quoted line from the comic strip Pogo is the one that goes: "We have met the enemy and it is us." I don't know what Pogo who resides in the Okefenokee Swamp would say when soon after September 11th the United States began fighting terror with weapons of war. I would posit that soon after the fighting began we were up to our neck in alligators and as a country didn't have time or interest in whatever swamp or swamps we could have or should have or might have been draining on September 10th.

At the same time I was engaging my own enemy within. The truth is when the battle is with one's self the goal can't be to kill our adversary. It's not a fight I could have or would have picked. What I do know is when I was given the key to that locked door I was going to open it and find out what was inside. When I did all those fears that resided there were suddenly free, all the stories, legends, and myths I had grown up with suddenly in doubt. So much exposed to the light of day and discovery. Using a Biblical reference I wonder: do I have what it takes to discover the new wine as well as create the new wine skins needed to hold it?

I would know soon enough.

My father's final gift to me was grace

So I was someone I could embrace

I was someone that I could face

My father's final gift to me was grace



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