

THE STORIES AND SONGS OF OUR LIVES



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The Fall of 2010 until May 2012

Years ago, I took classes on novel writing from two teachers that had very different philosophies. My favorite, Jack Cady, believed that writing was a means of discovery and if we knew where we were going, why spend the time. The other, whose name I can't recall, believed, at least when it came to writing, we needed to know where we were going in order to get there. I understand both points of view. I also appreciate John Muir's belief that "all who wander are not lost."

What I came to realize in the fall of 2010, was that, for the first time, I was comfortable in all my professional roles: as a songwriter, as a member of The Brothers Four, with Mike McCoy, as a solo artist, and, to a lesser degree, as a story teller. I told someone that all the clothes finally fit. It had also been ten years since I had been freed from having to keep the darker sides of my family history and by extension, an unspoken personal story as well as the secret.

Through the years I'd accumulated lots of recordings of my songs, stories and photos that could be arranged into something meaningful and, possibly, even beautiful. With that in mind I decided to take a lifetime of songs and stories to tell the story of a lifetime while also creating the soundtrack of a journey. In order to do that it would mean untying the knots and untangling the tangles in the various threads of my life, spin those threads into yarns, and to hopefully weave those threads into a tapestry. Easier said than done, of course.

As I began to examine my life and career, they naturally arranged into seven different time periods or stages. I decided each stage should have seven chapters. Inspired by my time in the mountains, I decided I would tell my story and sing my songs, in some form, as if around the campfire. Each campfire would contain a song and a story told in the spoken tradition.

The Internet made it possible to share my songs and stories with more people than ever. I spent months creating a team of people to help me. Some of them have walked every mile: Al Bergstein as videographer and George Rezendes as the sound recording engineer. Pattie Miles has been there for the recording of every story and has helped to better each one. Jonathan Henson-Lockhart is a true Web Master. In the early going, I relied on Renne Emiko Brock to make me comfortable sharing my life in the virtual world.

When the project began, I felt it could be completed in a year and that it would involve mostly organizing and sharing memories. I could never have imagined it

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



would take more than six years and lead to so many moments of discovery, while also causing me to feel lost so much of the time along the way.

Easter of 2011 I experienced one of those moments of discovery. I have always felt lucky that I grew up in the Christian tradition. Yet when I was twenty-two, overwhelmed by what felt like hypocrisy in organized religion, I slammed the door on that part of my life. When I did go to church, it was to be with family or friends in what was always a comfortable and often comforting place. That Easter first some neighbors and then one of my singing partners, independently invited me to hear a pastor preach at a new church in Port Ludlow. It would be the first time I would go to a church to simply worship in more than forty years. When I returned to my seat after taking communion, I became very emotional. Over the next few days, I realized at that moment of communion, the metaphorical door I had slammed shut so long ago had quietly and unexpectedly opened. A childhood faith, long locked away, had been freed. While I would never be the boy I had been or believe as he did again what a gift it can be to live life among opened doors and windows, shining light into what before had been simply darkness.

A few months later I prepared to open a door on a secret that had been in our family for nearly a hundred years. I talked with my mother and each of my brothers to tell them of my plans. While I may not have needed their permission, I certainly wanted their blessing, which thankfully, I received. At the same time I realized the story I was telling would and must be my mine. The choice to tell their stories would be their own.

On December 11, 2011 I lit the first virtual campfire. The journey to share the stories and songs of a life had begun. On May 21, 2012, at the tenth campfire, I told the story of a family history of mental illness. I was in Japan when the campfire was "lit." In one way, it was as simple and as anonymous as placing a message in a bottle and heaving that bottle as far as I could into a virtual sea. A long locked door was also finally opened and life would never be the same.



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