

A JOURNEY OF GRATITUDE, GRIT, AND GRACE

May 2012 until May 2014

The Brothers Four have performed with little interruption since 1960. The group's popularity in Japan has played a significant role in that longevity. We have recorded specifically and sometimes exclusively for that market. The Brothers Four Japanese Fan Club, or Friends Club, remains active and vital.

As I've talked about at previous campfires, no one explanation can account for the depth or the length of our relationship with Japan and the Japanese people. In the US, The Brothers Four have often been compared, not always favorably, with The Kingston Trio. In Japan, young people discovered both groups simultaneously. The first Brothers Four hits included minor ones that continue to be more recognized in Japan than in the US. Popular folk music faded in the US, overshadowed by among things the assassination of President Kennedy, the coming of The Beatles, Bob Dylan plugging-in, and the Viet Nam War. The same wasn't true in Japan. The Japanese have always loved singing together. Folk music was a way for them to do that long before the popularity of karaoke. A few years ago a man from Osaka, speaking slowly and from the heart, may have summed up the relationship best.

"Because of The Brothers Four, I learned English." (He is talking about listening over and over to Brothers Four recordings, while looking at copies of English and Japanese lyrics.) "Because I learned English," he continued, "I did well in school. Because I did well in school, I went to a good university. Because I went to a good university I got a good job. Because I got a good job I met my friends. Because I met my friends I met my wife. Because I met my wife I got my kids. Because I got my kids I have my life."

Before the 2012 concert tour, the group's 52nd trip to Japan, I created a Japanese website for my Campfires. I translated a number of Campfires into Japanese along with Trail Guides that helped explained the journey. I had enough Guides printed to hand one to everyone who came through the CD signing lines in hopes of increasing "traffic" and interest and ultimately sales at my website.

Like a lot of people with a website and something to share, it remains a challenge to get people to spend their time and money on what I'm doing. I promised myself that whatever happened (or didn't happen) that I would tell the truth as best I knew how and do the work as well as I was able.



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



On a more personal note in December of 2012, I had a life changing moment with my mother. I was about to become a granddad. We were having a conversation about my birth. Who knows why, at that particular moments, her long unspoken emotions formed into tears and rolled down her cheeks? She told me that with all that was going on back then--including my dad's hospitalization and years of uncertainty and frequent separations--she simply wasn't ready for another child when I was born.

It was one of those moments where the earth shifted ever so slightly and certain things became clear for the first time. So much that I had absorbed as a newborn could be explained. On some level, as newborns do, I had made all the anxiety and pain around me about me. Now here it was, spoken out loud and understandable, a stories of humans simply being human. I felt sudden and immense relief and release. It was truly a healing moment.

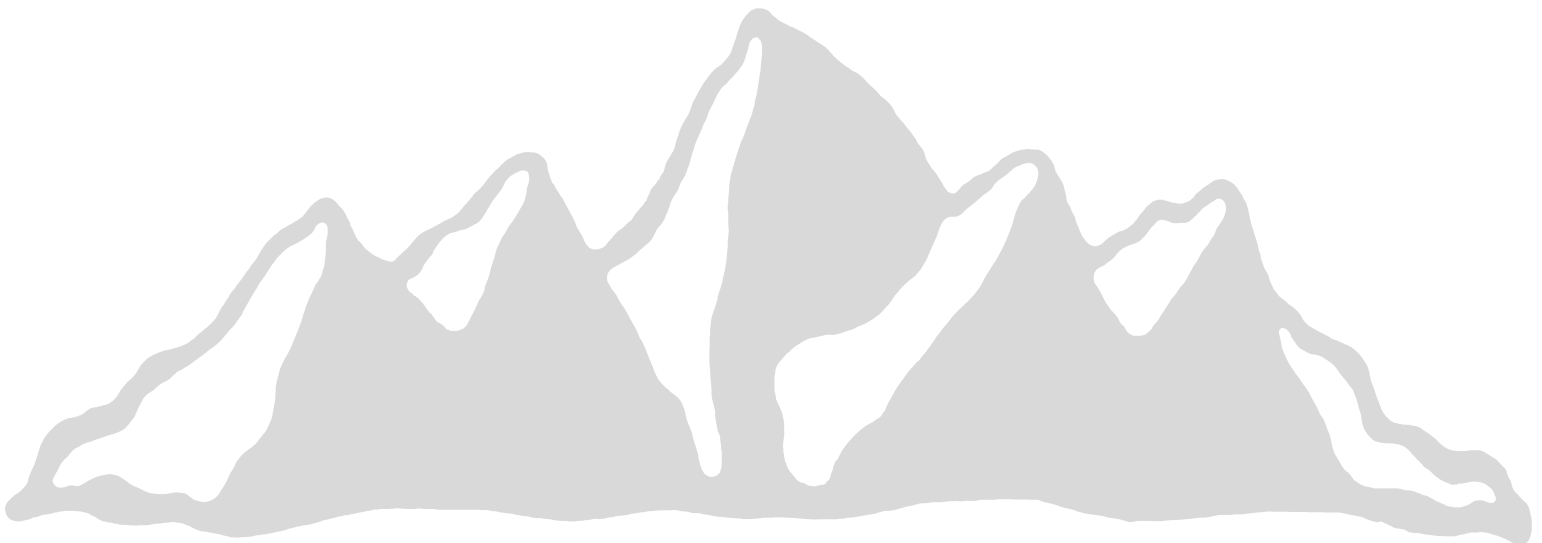
Our experiences become the stories and songs of our lives. In part because that conversation with my mother, a year later, after another difficult conversation, I was able to have even more empathy for her. In our family the story that got told was that after I was born my dad got well and came home. To be given that kind of power as a newborn was, for me, a mixed blessing at best. The shadow in the story is that, at no place in the telling of it, was there a mention that he had come home because of my mom. When I think of some of the battles she and I had when I when I was growing I wonder what if any those unconscious undercurrents might have played. When all is said and done the story's many angles are a way of knowing my mother and myself better. Also, upon reflection, a better understanding of all that happened gives me a greater insight into our lives together and how all of our stories can be both simple and complex at the same time.

In the spring of 2013 I had a wonderful experience. Someone took the time to nominate me for the National Four String Banjo Hall of Fame. While I didn't make it in, I was delighted with the nomination when I realized that few, if any other performers, had shared the four-string banjo with a greater audience over a longer period of time than I have. A lot of people who know my music and me wrote thoughtful and often beautiful things supporting my nomination. I treasure them to this day.

It didn't take long as I sifted through my life to realize I wanted to reach out to people I'd hurt along the way. It was important to apologize to them. In some cases there was a need to ask for forgiveness and if possible make amends. As I began to do that I realized the hardest person to forgive and ask for forgiveness would be myself.

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One day someone asked what I was doing. I told them I was on a “thank you and I’m sorry tour.” After a good laugh, I explained further that I also called it my “Journey of Gratitude and Grace.” Eventually, I realized that to finish the journey, it would also take more than a little *grit*. Soon that word was added to my story and the triumvirate was complete: Gratitude, Grit and Grace.



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