



## The Mourning Ryde Your All-American College Show–Wasn't That a Time

When I look at my life from this place—at its many twists and turns—I realize that instead of becoming one of the most important people in my life—professionally and personally—it's possible that Mike McCoy might simply have been “someone I sang with in college”—who I get together with from time to time—and talk with every once and a while about how in 1968 we were part of “Your All American College Show” which if remembered at all is remembered as the place where The Carpenters—known then as The Dick Carpenter Trio—first appeared on national television.

When I started college in the fall of 1965—I joined a fraternity—the one The Brothers Four came out of a few years earlier—and a gregarious classmate—John Buller—the first guy who knew everyone's name—came up and asked if he could sing with me—sure I said—we even chose a name—The Pendletons because we thought we looked pretty cool in flannel Pendleton shirts—which were popular at the time—(We had no idea that a few years earlier a group from Hawthorne, California likely using similar reasoning called themselves The Pendletones—or that Murray Wilson the father of three of that band's members insisted the record company change the name—so by the time his sons—Brian, Karl and Dennis—found out about the change—the first record with their new name—The Beach Boys—had been printed and shipped—and the rest is as you might say is musical history)

Buller and I happily said yes when Mike McCoy asked if he could sing with us. McCoy epitomized a certain college cool—a kind that makes so much sense to another 18 or 19 years old boy—he had a certain nonchalance—things also appeared to come “naturally” to him—and easily for him—enough so that he was known as The Golden Boy—The fact that nobody knew if he liked the name or not made him even cooler—he also had an unbelievable voice and a terrific sense of harmony—and maybe most important—he looked better than anyone else in a Pendleton shirt—

After we'd been singing for a while another classmate, Mike Dwyer, asked if he could play the bass for us so John put away his gut bucket and soon Dwyer was singing as well as playing and for reasons I can't remember—maybe because the name The Brothers Four was already taken—we decided to call ourselves The Mourning Ryde—that's Mourning—spelled-m-o-u-r-n-i-n-g—and Ryde—spelled-r-y-d-e. I can't remember now how we came up with the name or that ingenious spelling. We serenaded the sororities and even got an occasional paying job. We recorded every song we knew—all 16 of them—before the Christmas break in December of 1967—the next spring a group of LA talent scouts began visiting campuses looking for college kids to be part of a syndicated TV show—they videotaped auditions in a hotel room—I don't remember how we found out about it—I (actually) tried out as a solo artist as well as part of the Mourning Ryde—sometime in the spring of 1968 we got the word—the group was chosen to “compete”

In retrospect my feeling is that what the creators of the show—during a time of incredible upheaval—wanted to portray a certain image of college kids—one that didn't include protesting a war, growing long hair—or experimenting with drugs—

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and The Mourning Ryde—4 guys wearing University of Washington blazers—looked and sounded the part— while we actually sang pretty well—we fit an image they were trying to project.

In fact Dwyer was part of ROTC—Reserve Officers Training Corp—that summer and when word got out he was on TV—other ROTC guys started singing “Act Naturally” to him—a song Ringo Starr was known for at that time—

They flew us from Seattle to LA on Friday, June 7th—we were staying a few blocks from The Ambassador Hotel—one of the first things we did was visit that hotel’s kitchen pantry—saw how wooden wall panels had been removed as evidence—and where Robert Kennedy lay dying 3 days earlier.

Rehearsal was Saturday. Each show was half an hour in length and included four acts with a winner announced at the end of each show. They filmed two shows on the same day so we were one of 8 acts milling around that weekend. I especially remember The Kappa Pickers from Indiana University. We traveled by shuttle bus from the hotel to the studio. On Sunday the four of us laughed about the make-up we had to wear. The host was Dennis James who had been the announcer on Ted Mack’s Original Amateur Hour. Each show had three judges—with familiar names and faces—one of our judges was Greg Morris—part of the Mission Impossible cast—a popular TV show of the day—The show was taped in front of an enthusiastic studio audience warmed up and then prompted by an electric applause sign—it would light up and they would clap—the show began with four girls in cheer leading outfits introducing Dennis James who then appeared from behind a curtain.

I don’t remember feeling nervous—or if we were part of the 1st or 2nd taping that day—we did our song—Wasn’t That a Time—using a Milt Okun arrangement we stole off a Peter, Paul, and Mary record—and within half an hour the judges voted—and our group was presented with an oversized trophy and a check for \$1000—and suddenly—though we might have told ourselves it didn’t matter it was pretty hard to remain nonchalant or to act as if we didn’t care.

A fraternity brother from Fullerton, California bought tickets for us to see the Dodgers—so later that night we saw Don Drysdale break the record for scoreless innings—we were a natural part of the LA crowd—leaving shortly after the record was broken and long before the game was over

Flying back to Seattle on Monday morning we felt like winners— carrying our three-foot trophy onto the plane for all to see. We noticed that Harry Belafonte was sitting in the first class cabin and decided we needed his autograph. While he did sign his name on the scrap of paper I handed him he wasn’t happy about it. I must admit after the look he gave me I felt a little less like a winner returning to my seat in the coach section.

The Mourning Ryde was scheduled to return to LA in a few weeks for the final rounds. In the meantime I was off to New York to begin finding out what it meant to be a social worker for the summer on the Lower East Side of Manhattan—after just a few days I was part of a camp for city kids on a little island off Bermuda—the last thing they wanted to hear was Kumbaya from some white guy—still every night I

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sang—every night they listened—each day a little more trust—each evening a little more understanding—realizing we are all on this island together—doing the best we can and trying to watch out for one other—which doesn't mean I wasn't delighted at the end of that week to fly from Hamilton, Bermuda to LA for the weekend—reuniting with my three singing partners—greeting them with a “soul shake” when I met them on the shuttle bus at LAX—

There were eight acts again this time—each of us winners of a previous show—a lot of talent—including a group called The Dick Carpenter Trio from Cal State at Long Beach with a young Karen Carpenter sitting behind her drum kit—in her go-go boots—singing “Dancing in the Street.” We were not one of four finalists.

John Wayne appeared for the final show—dropping from the sky in a helicopter—walking onstage just as he did in so many movies—this time presenting awards and checks to the winners—2nd Place—to The Dick Carpenter Trio—the Grand prize—to Linda McClure—a singer and dancer extraordinaire from UCLA—whose previous claim to fame was as the Bruin mascot—

At the cast party after the taping John Wayne came up to John Buller—put an arm around him—looked him in the eye—both of them close to six and a half feet tall—and said—“You're one big so and so”—

That night The Mourning Ryde went to see Frankie Valle and the Four Seasons at the Coconut Grove. Traces of make-up still on our faces—dressed up in our matching blazers—we had no idea where we were going—but for a moment we felt for sure we had arrived—

When I flew back in to New York City the next day kids began coming up to me—as if to assure themselves that they—that we—had truly been together on that now faraway island—a couple weeks later on a small black and white TV set on top of a folding chair on the sidewalk on East Broadway I watched myself and three of my friends sing a song—get a check—and win a trophy—and as those around me on that street corner laughed and pointed—I didn't know if the world was a better place but I knew I was better for the experience—

When I returned to the University that fall—filled with the naïve dreams and aspirations of a 21 year old—I didn't know before the year was out I would audition for a spot in The Brothers Four—listening to recordings of Frankie Valle and the Four Seasons waiting for the phone call that would tell me I had gotten the job.

I then had to tell the other guys in The Mourning Ryde I wouldn't be doing the Saturday nights that winter at the Ski resort—where we'd gotten a job singing for ski tickets—dinner—and beer—McCoy says he might forgive me one of these days—

A few months later I would be back in New York—this time staying at the Hampshire House across from Central Park as a member of The Brothers Four—there was a meeting at the Carnegie Deli with Milt Okun—a name I'd read on the back of numerous folk albums—he who'd been Harry Belafonte's musical director—arranged songs and produced albums for many familiar and famous folk groups—including The Brothers Four—and at the time of our meeting was about to enjoy his greatest success as John Denver's publisher and producer—

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Trying to explain why I might be a credible replacement for Mike Kirkland I explained that I had been part of a singing group in college and had recently been on TV.

"I saw you" he said "you weren't bad—and you know you did steal one of my arrangements."

To this day I don't know if he was kidding or serious.

What I do know is how glad I am for the memories—how grateful that McCoy and I have been friends and have kept singing for all these years—



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