

## The Street Musician

August 2017

Late in life, after more than seven decades, I had realized all I had seen and done - a full life with only small inconsequential regrets. My independent free life really only began a little more than a decade ago when I retired from active work and parenthood.

The final chapters were full of unexpected change as were all previous chapters for me and as they were and have been for everyone evermore. I had lived and seen the usual progressions of childhood, marriage, children, grandchildren, loss of parents and the like as most of us do. My successes and failures had been typical and usual; my fortunes modest and average, my luck good and bad.

After coasting along and following life's tailwinds through all of this, I forced some changes for the final chapter. I tacked around toward the headwinds.

I had lived through more than a decade with my wife suffering a slow degenerative illness with death as a certain outcome. Perhaps the loss of her, piece by piece, had had a psychological impact on me - my expectations, my passions, my needs.

I embarked on many new enterprises using my maker-builder nature in many imaginative and unforeseen directions. My passions grew more frantic and creative as I moved from one to the next.

Certainly I was searching for something; something closer to God and other people. I built things for people and myself. I reached out to Him who created me and new people everywhere I found them. I joined organizations while my nature is not to be a joiner. I experienced more of the disappointments and joys of knowing human beings.

No doubt there was a neediness, but I am not ashamed of that.

I expanded my creativity. I read. I wrote. I published. I acted on small stages for small groups of people. I explored poetry and music. I learned as a beginner, as I had always done, once again new things.

I gravitated farther away from people of high station and closer toward those of low. This was gratifying and brought me happiness.

I became a street musician.



After visiting City Hall, I acquired an inexpensive permit, to be renewed annually, that legally permitted performance on public grounds with the possibility that the passing crowd might donate small amounts of money into my inverted hat placed prominently on the ground.

I wanted two or three things from this.

First, I wanted attention and some recognition. I had faced years of dismissiveness, active disinterest, officiousness, incongruent self-interest and rejection from individuals and groups of people close to me and far away in my writing career. God knows, try as I might, as a publisher of some good books, I had not earned back the expenses I had invested in that passionate career.

Second, I wanted to see how my music would sound out in the open and in the public view.

Last, I wanted to see if I could earn a little money from my art to provide for my family.

The rest of this I am going to tell you as it unfolded, as it happened.

I had lost faith in America in all of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and lived a few years of solitude in the 19<sup>th</sup> of my mind. There were many things I learned about the good, the bad and the ugly, and experienced from that vicarious life – a love of God, my country, its history and the many old verities of human kind. It was natural to feel the music of my century as part of that broadening experience and self-journey.

I still wanted to share with and teach others the ideas I had grown to understand and learn. There were many stories and history behind the music I came to love.

Here are a few:

*The Minstrel Boy-*

Actually written by Thomas Moore, an Irish poet, singer, songwriter from Dublin in the early 1800's about the 1798 Irish rebellion, it was thought to be an American Civil War song. While popularized in the Civil War, it appeared again in World War I and in the movie *Black Hawk Down* about American special-forces in Mogadishu, Somalia.

*Carrickfergus-* An old melancholy Irish tragic lament about a place on the east coastline of Northern Ireland near Belfast.

*Ashokan Farewell-* Written by Jay Ungar in 1982, it was adopted by Ken Burns in his renowned Civil War documentary film series as its core theme a few years later.

*We Shall Overcome*- A popular protest song attributed to Pete Seeger, it was performed by many artists in the 1960's.

(to be continued)