

## Another Life- Song Notes

Harbor... Harbor began with an improvisation one night in November, 2016. I was playing the melodica with headphones on with lots of plate reverb. I started to repeat a chordal motive and liked it. I set a mic up and recorded the melodica part. Then I put an arpeggiated guitar part on with my 1930 Martin 2-17. I lived with it until sometime in March. During that interval I began to think that the sound reminded me of the container ships coming into the harbor of Baltimore. Then I thought of my friend, Craig Eastman, who is a multi-instrumentalist in Los Angeles, and thought he could add some more colors to the track. Craig played mandolin, lap guitar, violin and tenor violin. This track always takes me back to Baltimore. I sometimes walk with my Dad at Fort McHenry's one mile loop, and we usually hear and see a container ship arriving to the port to unload. When they blow their horn, it echoes off of the brick buildings that surround the harbor.

Kings of the Grandstand... When I was growing up my Dad would take me and my brother to the horse racing tracks in the Baltimore area. We would go to beautiful Bowie, lovely Laurel and pretty Pimlico. I was always struck by the horses, the jockeys, the colors, the sounds as well as the gamblers themselves. There were two areas for the horse players, the clubhouse and the grandstand. The clubhouse was enclosed with heat in the winter, air in the summer and fine dining. The grandstand was open air, exposed to the elements. There were bleachers you could stand on and cheer your horse on to the finish. Between the clubhouse and grandstand was an area called the paddock, where the horse players could take a close look at the horses. This was where the jockey, the trainer and the owner would go over last minute strategies and the jockeys would mount up. They're off...

Another Life To Live... One evening in February I was at home looking at a collection of Farm Ballads by Will Carleton, first published in 1873. One ballad struck me, "Gone with a Handsome Man", the story of a wife leaving her husband for a *han'somer* man. It reminded me of country music's first family, The Carter Family. Sarah Carter left her husband A.P. for another man in 1932.

Mr. Wilson, the Stonecutter... The neighborhood I grew up in, Paradise, on the west side of Baltimore had a bar called the Paradise Tavern. There was an older gentleman named Mr. Wilson who was there nearly every night. He sat on a stool on the corner of the bar that had his name on it. I knew a man from an AA group in the neighborhood that called drunkards *stonecutters* because they would have too much of the *falling down water* and hit their heads on the marble stoops in Baltimore.

Benjamin Banneker... Just west of where I grew up in Paradise is a community called Oella. It is on the Baltimore county side of the Patapsco river just across from the 18th century mill town, Ellicott City. Oella had a famous resident named Benjamin Banneker. He was an African-American who lived there from 1736 to 1806. While on tour in Florida I picked up a book, *The Life of Benjamin Banneker* by Silvio A. Bedini at a library book sale. I had heard of him and went to where his grave was thought to be up in Oella when I was in high school. There was even a Benjamin Banneker elementary school in Catonsville. Now there is a Benjamin Banneker Historical Park and Museum. His story is remarkable and if it weren't for him laying the cornerstones of our nation's capital, we wouldn't have the traffic we all enjoy and love on the Washington beltway.

Down Where the Dogwoods Bloom... In late March, early April a good friend from the U.K. visited me in Nashville. We drank coffee and tea, took long walks, recorded some older songs from his back catalogue, wrote some new ones and went to the Opry. While he was here two dogwoods, one white, one pink, blossomed and we had some severe storms. In the evenings

## Another Life- Song Notes Page 2

we would listen to WSM, the *legend*, and hear the storm warnings from the great Eddie Stubbs.

Seven Mondays... Mondays are generally work days for most folks but for some, they are like Sundays, a day of rest. Those Mondays can be long when you're wishing to be next to the one you love who is so far away. In the days of the American Civil War, letters were written between lovers and loved ones and they could take weeks to be delivered. In this day of modern ways and miracles, we are able to have instantaneous communication through text, email, phone and even video chat. But those inventions don't stop us from counting the days till the next time we see the ones we love in person.

Lillian and the Blue Car... In October 2016 I received an email from a painter friend and collaborator, Ann Phelan, who was announcing one of her works to be on exhibit in Zurich. I liked the curated painting and wrote back to compliment her work. She told me that an image in the painting was most likely inspired by a car I had years ago, a blue Pontiac Ventura, 1972. She asked about the car. I began remembering things about it and as I wrote down my thoughts, I realized that they would work well in a song. Aunt Lil was my paternal grandmother's sister and everything in the song is just the way I remember her. She never did remarry but there was a man in her life, though they never shared an abode. We called him Uncle Bunk.

Night Time Sky... I know folks in Baltimore that have never left the neighborhood that they grew up in. That's okay. Happiness comes in many places. And one of those can be the very place that you come from. The Irish poet Michael Longley has said that "place is inexhaustible." Some think that *travel broadens the mind*. Being a troubadour, I tend to agree with that. Though we may be separated by geography, the night time sky can connect and give sustenance. When Sue Griffiths sent me the lyric I was struck by the small town, big city part of the story, a story so often repeated. It made me think of the Tompall Glaser/Harland Howard song, *The Streets of Baltimore*. One of my favorite lines is, "It was all my hallucination."

Requiem for an Organ Player: There was a man who lived down the street from me when I was a kid who I knew as Uncle Buddy. In those days we called close neighbors, though not blood related, aunts and uncles. He would fix my bike for me. He also loved to play the organ. In the summer, when the doors and windows were opened, he would fill the avenue with sweet music.

Chesapeake Narrows... I've only lived in two cities, Baltimore and Nashville. I grew up in Baltimore and though I have lived in Nashville on two different occasions, Baltimore is still home to me. I have done so much touring during both of my stays in Nashville that I have never felt as connected as I do to Baltimore. Nashville is a transient city with people coming and going everyday. It's not often you meet someone from Nashville. But it is Music City. And music certainly has a sense of place. So in that respect, I am home-with the music. Those walks with my Dad around Fort McHenry have always connected me to the place I call home. My Dad was born not far from Fort McHenry on East Randall Street in South Baltimore and you can see him light up with winsomeness when he comes into the neighborhood from West Baltimore where he lives now. There is a vitality to ordinary things.

Notes by Billy Kemp, July 2017