



Bill Mullen

Stories and Music Book

September 2016



Mullen It Over – Stories and Music

By

Bill Mullen

Introduction

Firstly – Thank You – if you’re reading this it means you have my new album.
I hope you like it.

The inspiration for these songs came from several sources, mostly my memories of growing up in Dundee, Scotland and friends and family who had an influence on me, or stories which I just had to write down and share.

There are a few people I would like to recognise for their help :

- Dorothy (my wife) who has been on this path with me 100% of the way, patiently working around my clutter and giving her seal of approval when needed.
- Kyle, Valerie, Big Tam, Dorothy, The Mahers who have approved the songs which include them.
- Anthony Moynihan for the laughs around Sausages for Tea.
- Kevin Nettleingham who recorded the album for his skillful engineering, musical skills and advice... and Caleb for his artwork.
- Michelle Rupp my Tour Manager for finding me places to play around the USA.
- Steve and Cathi Behrens for encouraging me to “Write It Down”.

So – please read the stories, enjoy the songs and you can follow me as I continue this journey by signing up for my monthly newsletter (on my website) and “liking” my facebook page below :

- <http://www.bill-mullen.com> (website)
- <http://www.facebook.com/billmullenentertains> (facebook)
- <https://wordpress.com/stats/insights/billmullenblog.wordpress.com> (blog)
- and please feel free to send email feedback to me at bill@bill-mullen.com

1. I Heard Your Laugh - Story

My dad was a character. He worked as an electrician for the Dundee Eastern Cooperative Society (DECS) in Scotland for 25 years – happy, busy and always up to something... usually involving pints of beer and or a wee dram. Wherever you were, you would hear him before you saw him, he had an infectious laugh that just cheered you up, however you were feeling.

He would always have a story, like the time when he was cycling to work down the Lochee road and his bike got stuck in the tramlines going downhill – he just had to go where they went, in completely the wrong direction. He would also borrow vans from the DECS – I remember him waiting outside my school to give me and my pals a lift home in a big wine and cream coloured butchers shop van with a huge metal cows head on the front and a shop window on the side. We howled with laughter all the way home as we hung on to the meat hooks in the back and my dad honked the horn which went “MOOOO !!!” So you get the picture, my dad was full of fun - a very happy man.

We (my brother Doug and I) knew very little about his childhood or teenage years, he said he just went to St Johns school in Dundee but gave no details. He was an expert at changing the subject – and we boys were easily distracted by his stories or wee toy soldiers or metal cars he’d just produce from his overalls.

Years later after he’d passed away at the age of 75, my auntie Cathy was suffering from cancer and knew she didn’t have long. One day when she was alone with my wife Dorothy, she told Dorothy that my dad had sworn her and my Uncle Eddie (my dad’s brother) to secrecy - they were never to tell the boys (Doug and I) of his childhood. Since she knew she didn’t have long, Cathie had decided that she could tell Dorothy and still be true to her vow of secrecy to my dad.

He was one of nine children, the third youngest. His mother died when he was five years old and his father had gone blind, which he claimed was caused by mustard gas poisoning he suffered from during World War I. The father couldn’t cope, so the five youngest children were sent off to an orphanage in Paisley, their father’s home town and the older lads were sent to work to earn money.

I still know very little of that time, I have a picture of them in the orphanage which Auntie Cathy gave Dorothy and about a month ago (July 2016) my cousin Kristina, daughter of James, the second youngest brother, discovered our uncle David, the youngest brother, still alive and well, living in Glasgow. I have still to meet him, but he told a story about how poor and hungry they were in the orphanage. The next door neighbours took pity on them and would leave cheese out for them. David being the smallest was hoisted out of the window and sent to get the cheese. I bet he still remembers the taste of the cheese till this day.

I wrote the song because I wanted to share how well my dad had done to live a happy, loving, fulfilled life despite his horrible start. It’s ironic that he never told anyone – but I have chosen to tell everyone, I am proud of him and how he didn’t let that bad start ruin his life, He’d just laugh and have a “carry-on”.

2. And We Sang – Story

My mum was the queen of our house. Her father, Patrick Kelly (from Dublin) died when she was four, so she was brought up, an only child, by her mother in Glasgow, Scotland. She told me stories of how her mother was a bit over protective, she wasn't allowed to swim, ride a bike or do anything that might harm her. When World War II broke out, she was 11. She told me that because they lived in the city, all children needed to be evacuated to the country. Her mother was very upset by that, but as there were bombings of the Glasgow shipyards by the German Luftwaffe, she agreed to let my mum go.

My mum and her pal were quite excited to be going off to the country – it was an adventure for them. Two days after they had arrived at the farm where they were to stay, her mum showed up at the door to take her home, she couldn't bear to be without her wee girl. She said "If we get bombed, we get bombed - at least we'll be together". So my mum spent the war years with her mum trying to eke out the ration stamps for food and hiding in the air raid shelters at night as the German bombers flew overhead pounding the Clydebank shipyards.

Although it sounds scary for a young lass, my mum found it exciting and enjoyed the nightly sing-songs in the air-raid shelter, where people would share what little they had and enjoy stories and songs until the all-clear sirens would sound. Her mum of course was not pleased that my mum was enjoying it, so she had to be more subdued around her mum.

At the end of the war, she was delighted when rationing was lifted and different varieties of food started showing up in shops - she remembered her first banana and first pineapple with immense delight. They had been able to get banana flavoured things during the war... but a real banana – wow – seventy years later she would still light up when she recalled that first taste of a real banana... and a pineapple... unbelievable, how lucky she was!!!

My mum's stories were always of nice things and if bad things happened, she believed that well, it must have been meant. Any disappointment was brushed away with "well, never mind, it just wasn't meant to be...". That was her simple recipe for life - all good that happened was "meant to be" all bad "just wasn't meant to be" and we would all just move on.

She worked in a shoe shop when I was at primary school. One day her boss, Mr Hislop, took her aside and said "Rita, you are wasted here – you can do more than this, why don't you go back to study and become a teacher – there is a shortage and you'd be great at that". I think that's the only career advice my mum ever had – so she took it and passed through to teaching with flying colours. I remember her emerging from the St Clements school surrounded by a host of children, they were asking her questions, telling her stories, laughing, smiling, delighted, a child on each hand and some clinging on to her dress. My mum radiant, smiling, answering calmly and happily in the middle of the scene.

Even after her stroke at the age of 74, she remained bright for another ten years, still pampered, an avid Glasgow Celtic (or was it Henrik Larsson) supporter and her song at sing-song time "que sera sera". A calm would descend in the nursing home as everyone sang knowing that whatever will be, will be.

3. One in a Million - Story

A song to my wife, Dorothy. As the years go by and my life develops, I more and more reflect on how our lives would be totally different if we had just been in a different place, time or took different choices. So many things would not have happened. Fortunately mine is a happy story, it's about how I met Dorothy.

It was a Friday night in Dundee, I was attending Dundee College of Commerce and sharing a flat with my classmate, Clive Lumgair. Clive worked in the Dundee University students union behind the bar most weekends and had decided to have a party at our flat that Friday. Clive often decided to have parties at our flat. Some were big, some weren't, it depended on how many people Clive invited from the University union. My pal Mike, the bass player in my band, and I, both single boys, decided that we wanted to take a date to the party and by Friday evening it became clear that we just hadn't asked anyone to go with us. As we walked up Crichton Street we were both feeling a bit disappointed in ourselves, we hadn't had the courage to ask someone out. At the top of Crichton Street, two nice looking girls our age were walking along the Nethergate towards us. Neither of us had ever even tried to pick up a stranger in the street before, but we looked at each other and decided "why not?".

The girls turned out to be Dorothy and her friend Shona. They had gone to Kirkton High School, a protestant/ non-denominational school, Mike and I had been at Lawside, a Catholic school... the chances of us meeting in normal circumstances were slim. We got talking, I really liked Dorothy, Mike liked Shona and off we went to the party. The party was a disaster, Clive had met this girl he liked and hadn't bothered inviting anyone else. Despite that Dorothy and I were getting on really well and she agreed to come along to the Dundee Leisure Centre the following evening where my band, "Badge" was playing. Fortunately she liked the band... and me ... and we started going out together.

Years later, when talking with friends about how we met, Dorothy told this tale of how she (in her usual 100 mph brain) considered all that could go wrong and what clues she would leave in blood on the sidewalk if the worst came to the worst... and she never gets the blond one (Mike had blond hair... (but Mike was also Mike...)). This was all a surprise to me ... I knew it wasn't normal for normal girls to go with people who approached them on the street... but it was just me and Mike – pretty harmless.

It does amaze me that this all happened more than forty years ago and we have been married for almost 38 years of that. We have two children, a boy, Kyle, 28 and a girl, Valerie, 25. Valerie is living in my mum & dad's old house in Scotland, married to an Oregonian, Kyle is engaged to a girl from Wisconsin, they are in Australia right now... heading for the USA soon (visa permitting). Again, it all amazes me – how much depends on chance, being in the right place at the right time.

I finished writing the song in December 2015, we were in San Diego, California for a couple of months in our RV – we had told each other that we shouldn't give each other presents – this travelling life slims down your need for "stuff"... and you've nowhere to put it anyway. So, this was Dorothy's 2015 Christmas present. I'm happy to say she still likes it... and it can still draw a tear. Who would have thought I would write a love song?

4. The Bold Parakeet :-Story

“The story of Stinky Sam the lucky sailor man”. It’s a child’s storybook – at least it will be as soon as I’ve written it.

It was November 2015 in Dundee, Scotland, I’d just turned 60. I’d played a gig at the Clep bar with my pal Pat Ferrie the day before. We played well, I was sweating hard (as usual), the beer was flowing, Big Tam had discovered “Monkeys Shoulder” whisky and insisted that I should have one... which led to more... I ate a hot Indian garlicky curry when I got home. I also think I smoked a cigar that night, maybe not, maybe I just ate one. In any case when I woke the next morning I was conscious of this sweaty, garlicky pungent smell in the room, it took a few minutes before I realized... it was coming from me. I remember laughing as I turned over amazed at how horribly I smelled (I’m not usually so bad... honest!) thinking “whisky and garlic and a darn fine cigar...” there’s a cracker of a line for a piratey song if ever there was. That’s how “Stinky Sam” came to be.

For those of you who come to my shows, I like to have some good going joiner-inners where people can sing the chorus – so I sat down to see if I could write a sea-faring song. I’d decided against a pirate song and instead wrote about Sam who started his career as a lowly clerk following his master at the dockside, taking notes and following up the administration with each deal the master made. My main focus was on the chorus – getting a rousing swinging sea-faring sound going. I did that, then was stuck... I needed a story, but was drawing a blank.

About three months later as we were travelling to Florida, we stopped overnight at an RV park where there was a lot of bird noises beside the main building. There were beautiful Parakeets in a big cage squawking boldly at us as we talked to them. I laughed as I realized I’d found the name of Stinky Sam’s ship... “the Bold Parakeet”. That evening, I opened up the song I’d started all those weeks ago and wrote about the adventure where Sam discovers a ship which had been attacked and a pirate ship which had attacked it... with no survivors on either side (hence the lucky sailor man). By the end of the song, he’d become the captain ... and he still washed once a month, if he needs it or not.

I finished the song a few weeks later in Florida, replacing “I fart in my bunk” with “I scratch in my bunk” (and I don’t care a jot) and the song worked, the story worked and I knew it was one my crowd would sing along to.

So between a Dundee gig to Florida the voyages of Bold Parakeet emerged... with a stinky captain.

The Bold Parakeet – Song : Key = C (capo5th fret play G)) (played on 12 string guitar)

Chorus

C F C F G
Whisky and Garlic and a Darn fine Cigar, Bottles of rum that are stinking of tar
C F C G C
I scratch in my bunk and I don't care a jot, I wash once a month if I need it or not

Verse 1

C G C G7
When I was a lad I was proper and fine, I studied, worked hard and found me a job,
C G C D G
I earned a few coppers and spent all my time, Chasing after the man who paid a few bob
The Bold Parakeet had five masts an' looked grand, It's rail was polished and gleamed in the sun
The first time I saw it I knew I would stand, On the deck and shout "Hey" I could be someone

Chorus

Verse 2

One day at the docks, master's making a deal, With a hearty old captain a trade oh-so sweet
Gold passed between them, it made my head reel, the seas I must rove on the Bold Parakeet

I found the sea captain in a tavern that night, We drank, we laughed and I joined his crew
We set sail the next day, I knew I was right, Adventure was calling and gold for me too

Chorus

Verse 3

While sailing from France we espied a large craft , Attacked and abandoned it drifted for hours
its wee boat hung fore and it's masts they lay aft, Its crew were all gone but its cargo was ours

A pirate ship, nearby floating we found, It listed to port and the crew were all dead
Caskets of treasure were ours to impound, Another wee hole sunk it to the sea bed

Chorus

Ukelele solo & whistle solo over Verse Melody

Chorus

Verse 4 (short verse)

For years I have travelled around the high seas, Captain and proud, my ship sails a treat
I'm as rich as a king, I do as I please, And I'll live out my days on the Bold Parakeet

Chorus after last line, repeat "I <wash> once a <month> if I <need> it or <not> (abrupt stop & Bodhran flourish) "

5. Adam - Story

This is a song I wrote for Adam Mathewson. He and Christine (my daughter's mother-in-law) had fallen in love and were living happily in the hills above Newburg, Oregon on his Christmas tree farm. He and Christine planned to meet us up in Washington at Ocean shores by the Pacific Ocean and camp together. We hadn't seen them for a year as we'd just completed our first years tour around the USA. I was playing there at the Galway Bay Irish Pub that weekend in August 2015. At the last minute we heard that they couldn't make it because Adam had developed a stubborn cough and needed to see a specialist.

That stubborn cough turned out to be cancer of the worst kind. After a lot of therapy and an operation, it became clear that he wouldn't survive. He held a "wheelchair party" which was his chance to meet people for the last time and say goodbye – essentially a happy type of funeral where he was present too. Dorothy and I flew from New Orleans to Portland 1st March 2016 to spend a few days with them and attend the party. Adam was in fine spirits, more concerned about everyone else than he was about himself. The party was a lot of fun and Adam spent time with everyone and explained the situation kindly to anyone who didn't really understand but were reluctant to ask. He was fantastic – I really respect what he did.

His son Andrew is a keen photographer (as was Adam) and between them they pulled together a huge slideshow which ran all day in the living room. You could sit and watch or dip in and out of it through the day. It was clear to see where they had focused – on the family, four children, on their shared love of the outdoors, rambling, exploring, mountain hiking in New Zealand, kayaking, walks with their dogs and the beauty of the Christmas tree farm where he lived.

I had decided before the trip that I would write him a song – but I was unsure of what to include, I already had a tag line of "the man in the Christmas tree farm" which I liked but I hadn't wanted to sum him up as only that. He was accomplished in IT work, he had travelled, had an engineering-type brain and had many other things he had done. We returned to New Orleans then travelled to Cocoa Beach Florida where I set about writing the song. The slide show at his party confirmed I was right, he was the man in the Christmas tree farm, he loved his family, he loved the outdoors, he loved Christine. That should be the song.

I cried so much writing the song I wondered if I would ever be able to sing it, but I had it in my head that I needed to write it, record it and send it to him... and quickly, as he didn't have long. The RV park we were in allowed me to use one of their halls to rehearse and record the song. Grass mowing while I was recording seemed to be essential, truck driving, engine revving, reversing, dog barking and loud chatting outside the building drove me crazy with frustration... but I got it done, eventually. The recording wasn't great – but it was good enough.

I sent it to him the afternoon of March 24th – the day I finished recording. It arrived just as he passed away surrounded by his family.

We miss you Adam.

Adam - Song : Key = E

Chorus

E B7 E
He's the man in the Christmas tree farm,
A E B7
At home on the hills with the sun and the rain,
A B C#m A
With the clearest of air and his dogs running free
E B7 E
He's the man in the Christmas tree farm,

Verse 1

E B7 E A E B7
The happy time, the handsome man, four children do adore
A B7 C#m A E B7 E
They hiked up hills, swam in the sea, He taught them to seek and explore

Chorus

Verse 2

New Zealand's high and hobbitty paths through tunnels they would climb
They found the beauty of the Earth suspended there in time

Middle 8

And oh - oh the Winter snow
And oh the Mountain's high
And oh - oh the brightest stars
In the twinkling mysterious sky

Whistle solo over chorus followed by Chorus

Verse 3

After saddened years he met up with his beautiful flaxen-haired love
Strolling together through tall Douglas fir, blessed with a gift from above

Chorus

Middle 8

Verse 4

So adieu to you my Christmas tree man, farewell to you our friend
Your smiles and your laugh will linger with us, preserved until our end

Chorus x 2

6. Night Questions - Story

When my son Kyle was a wee boy, I loved those days when I was home in time to put him to bed. He really enjoyed a bedtime story and a song... then he would ask his question. Every night, the same question – “Is everything going to be alright?” The first time he asked it, I was taken aback – there was so much going on in the world that I thought wouldn’t be alright that I felt I needed to explain the things which would and wouldn’t be alright... but we’ll be alright. He seemed happy with that. On those evenings when I was tired and just said “yes everything will be alright” he would look at me with his “oh, I don’t think so” face and ask “what about ... horrible subject 1?”, “what about ... horrible subject 2?”, he watched the Dutch news (which doesn’t pull its punches), and would remember these subjects. If he felt he wasn’t getting a full and frank parental analysis of “everything” he would keep asking... his “BS antenna” was tuned to a high sensitivity.

I remember thinking about the responsibility you have as a parent, it’s something I never thought about much before we had him. A child is a sponge just soaking up facts, news, feelings, sensations – all sorts of factors of this new world they’ve been born into. I also remember how unprepared I felt for this and how seriously he and I took these conversations just before he went to sleep. I worried that I might upset him and he wouldn’t sleep, but Kyle would be more upset if he sensed that he wasn’t getting a straightforward answer, it was that “antenna” again.

I quickly moved on from the “oh dear, what do I say” stage to the “well, here’s what I think about this...” stage. It was also clear that no answer was too big or complicated for Kyle, he just kept asking until he’d got you to break it down into reasonable chunks that actually made sense – or showed how little sense a situation had – but was indeed happening.

There were times where I would look for inspiration, sometimes after a long day at work or at stressful time I didn’t feel ready to be the wise father he needed... but he would also accept an answer of “I really don’t know, but here’s what I think about some of the things around it” ... and he would come back to the subject in days to come until I did know (memory like an elephant). One of those times was when my group at work was being told that it would be moving to London. We were living in a lovely wee village in the Netherlands on a cherry-blossom lined street with very nice elderly neighbours who adored Kyle. We were very happy – and as much as I wanted to keep an open mind about a move to London and looked for the positive... I really didn’t think it was a good move and was looking for alternatives that would keep our happy little lives intact in the Netherlands... then, with those clear innocent eyes, he looks at me and asks “Is everything going to be alright?”

Well, we survived this far – he’s 28 years old now, left the Netherlands with us when we moved to the USA in 2007, graduated with a double major in business studies and Japanese, spent four years in Japan, is fluent in Dutch, Japanese and English, is finishing a year in Australia, moving to the Netherlands then going to Wisconsin to get married to his lovely fiancé when his USA visa comes through... and still occasionally I still get a text from him... “Is everything going to be alright?” ... but now he attaches a smiley face to it.

Night Questions - Song : Key C,

Chorus x 2

C G C
Is everything going to be alright?, be alright?, be alright?
C G C (b - a)
Is everything going to be alright? - be alright ... dad?

Verse 1

Am G
what can I tell you ma bonny wee lad
Am G
I'm supposed to know the answers - because I am your dad
Am G
It's just a simple question but it means so much to you
C E7 Am (b) C
I want you to lie down and sleep and my answer to be true

Chorus

Verse 2

Before you came into this world I hadn't got a clue
What raising up a child would be, especially one like you
You ask a simple question, and look expectantly
There's so much in "everything" and you are asking me

Chorus

Verse 3

State of the country, the health of the planet
Drink, drugs, rock and roll - embrace it or ban it,
One says the right is left, the other says its right,
If you listen carefully , they're just talking shhhhhh...

Chorus

Middle 8 (rhythm change to slow 3/4 time)

Am G C G
Please give me wisdom - grant me insight I want to say "yes" and let him sleep all through the night
Am G C E7 Am (b) C
The follow-on questions, may be none or many, He listens and hears you through his BS antennae

Chorus followed by solo (ukulele),

repeat **Verse 1** followed by **Chorus x 2** (sudden stop ending)

7. Big Tam – Story : Key G

I had fallen out of touch with my pal and ex-bandmate Pat Ferrie. One time when I was back in Dundee, I heard that he would be drinking in the Clep bar, so we went up to the pub. There he was, an older version of my pal Pat, delighted to see me again – and I was immediately adopted by Pat’s friends in the Clep. When I left the pub later that evening, my sides were sore with laughing, Pat and his pals were so full of fun and jokes that I couldn’t stop laughing. What a great reunion that was. A short while afterwards, Pat and I played a gig in the Clep which was just like old times, I loved it. One of the characters in the pub stood out in more ways than one. He is Big Tam. One of the happiest, funniest men you could meet. Always in the thick of the fun, quick witted, throwing hilarious comments and jibes at anyone who deserved them. On music nights he really came into his element – he loves music, especially Scottish music. You can see the enthusiasm and excitement written all over him as he enjoys listening to the music – he is so passionately connected to the songs he likes it’s wonderful to see him in raptures.

On one of my visits to Dundee, I called Pat before we were due to play in the pub and asked him how was everybody in the pub and were they looking forward to our gig. Pat’s reply stuck with me, he said “ Oh, Big Tam’s fair excited, he’s bouncing all over the place!” I could just see Big Tam, he is a big man, with a big, solid beer belly - about 20 years pregnant - bouncing around as he does when he’s excited, full of energy, laughing and joking with everyone. Right enough, when our date came, Big Tam was right there joining in and enjoying every minute.

Big Tam travels around the area surrounding Dundee for his job. One of his missions in life is to find the best Scottish food (haggis, white puddings, bridies, clottie dumplings), bring some to the Clep to share with his pals. On a music night, Tam loves to bring along a “clottie dumpling” which is a rich, dark raisin and fruit-cake-like pudding boiled in a cloth (a clout) which makes a thin moist skin form around it, making it a dumpling. Tam knows I love clottie dumpling and we usually have a piece of it together with a nice malt whisky... delicious.

Tam also loves to do a solo spot where he sings his favourites “Dreamseller” which included his kazoo solo (much to the delight of the Clep audience) and “Star o’ the Bar” where he sings the words so passionately that you’d think he knows the woman (the burd) in the song. At one of my first gigs there, someone asked me to play “Sweet Caroline”, I did ... and at the part where USA audiences sing “so good, so good, so good”, Big Tam bounced into the middle of the floor in front of me and yelled “I don’t believe it, you’re makin’ it up... ya bitch” ... I was taken aback and realized that everybody had yelled it, laughing, with him. After the song I asked Pat – what was that all about ... he said “it’s just Big Tam... and laughed. So I make a point of playing the song when I go there just to hear Big Tam’s chant in the middle.

I visited Dundee in April and promised I would play one of my new songs – of course it had to be Big Tam. Before I started it I told them that it was a song about someone in the pub who’d made an impression on me. When Pat and I started playing, Tam lit up as he realized it was about him, he laughed, he wept, he bounced about and phoned his son – he was absolutely delighted – and admitted my description was spot-on. I laughed, as earlier that evening, before the song, he reached into his pocket and pulled out a folded note, with words of a song he likes and he said “I’ve got more in my coat” ... almost exactly my last verse .

Big Tam – Song : Key G

Verse 1

G D C D
Clottie dumping and a whisky, wi' a smile upon his face
C G A7 D7
A joke that's awfy funny And boozin at a pace
C G (f#) Em
Big Tam's fair excited As he bounces round the room
G D G
His favourite night is music night And he sings every tune

Chorus

C G D7 G
Big Tam wad make ye howl, Big Tam can make me greet
C G D G
There's music beating in his heart, And rhythm in his feet

Verse 2

Big Tam sings Dreamseller, Folks clap and sing it too
The place then goes bananas when he pulls out his kazoo
Singing acapella, He savours every word
When he sings Star o the Bar, You'd swear he knows the burd

Chorus

Middle Eight

Em Bm
Oh sing an old Scottish song wi' heather soft and sweet
C G D7
or one that makes us happy and stamping with our feet
Em Bm
Sing of golden whisky or a glass of red, red wine
G Em D7 G
If you're sensitive, well close your ears, for here's sweet Caroline
<<... *I don't believe it... you're makin it up... ye bitch* >>

Kazoo Solo

Verse 3

Tam's coaching his lad Thomas, On good songs he could play
Tam could name a million songs and sing them out all day
He'll reach into his pocket , pull out a folded note
Words o' a song he likes He's got more in his coat

Chorus x 2

8. No Reels and Jigs on Sundays - Story

This story was floating around in my head after hearing about the immigrants who arrived around the time of the American Civil War who were funneled straight to a line of Union Army recruiting desks, what did they know? What were they told? How unprepared they must have been. How different the worlds of love and hate – lining up to dance with joy or lining up to shoot and kill.

John MacLean lived in the West Scottish Highlands with his parents and two younger brothers. Their crofting land was poor and the cruel winter of 1858 left the family ruined. Hunger, cold and disease claimed the lives of his family forcing John to flee to the West coast where he was saved by a kind couple, Hector and Mary Hay. They found him by chance, starving and near to death at the side of the road. The Hays themselves were desperate and had decided to use what savings they had to escape to the New Country where there was talk of gold just waiting to be picked up. Whether that was true or not remained to be seen – but staying in the post-Culloden, starvation-ridden Scottish Highlands was no longer an option.

The Hays took John with them and by the time he had reached America, his strength and spirit restored, he was determined to forge a new life for himself with his friends in this land of opportunity.

This was indeed a strange and wild land, a collection of people of different nationalities, languages and customs all in search of a better life, all escaping from their own country's version of hell which had forced them to uproot their lives and run away – to somewhere unknown but hopefully better... they knew it couldn't be worse.

The Hays were a friendly couple and they and John met up with other exiled Scots on their travels through the American hills in search of the fabled rich seams of gold. At the end of a day's work they would gather together around a roaring fire to sing the songs and dance the dances which kept them attached to the memories of happy days in the Scottish Highlands. Strangely, Sunday, which was a strict day of rest in the old country, became a day where Scots from surrounding camps would gather together in the early afternoon and dance, drink and sing until the sun rose again to herald in a brand new working week.

It was on one of these magical Sunday evenings that John met beautiful bright eyed, russet haired Heather McEwan. They danced reels, jigs and howled with the whole crowd as the men lined up in a long row facing the women and the fiddle player would strike up the tune of the "Atholl Highlanders" played to remember the fearsome regiment which suffered heavy losses on Culloden's fields. This rousing tune would start the "Strip the Willow" dance where a couple would whirl round and round, weave through the lines of men and women, whirl again and repeat this until they reached the end of the lines dizzy, gasping for breath and laughing with the sheer joy of life. This is how John and Heather fell in love.

How John managed to find himself pressed into service of the Union army in the American Civil War is a complicated, harrowing story. We join him as he lies dying in the carnage following the 1st battle of the Bull Run in Virginia July 21st 1881, where the untried, raw Union army was soundly beaten and forced back to Washington. John lies blood soaked, dazed and mortally wounded watching the clouds dancing above him, the sound of the "Strip the Willow" Atholl Highlanders tune ringing in his ears, he remembers the joy and exhilaration of dancing to the beautiful fiddle music as he and Heather laugh and dance – lines of folk with dancing steps, not guns and furrowed brow – no more reels and jigs on Sundays.

No Reels and Jigs on Sunday – Song : Key B

Verse 1

B E
Where are my weel kent faces, Do you wonder where I've been,
B F#7
I'm lying here in this foreign land Its the worst I've ever seen
B E
I got caught up in a strangers' war, I fought for what was right
B F#7 B
But what was right brought me to this, my end is within sight

Chorus

B E
No reels and jigs on Sundays with the fiddle soaring high
B F#7
No birling roond though slick wi sweat with it stinging in my eye
B E
No singing till you're parched with thirst then quenching it with beer
B F#7 B
I'd love to hold you close again, I wish that you were here

Verse 2

My hunger drove me westwards, hungry for adventure too
My ship pulled in to harbour and my wish for gold I knew
I tried my best, but I found gold when you came into sight
We'd laugh and dance the night away in Scottish dancing flight

Chorus

Verse 3

Oh dance the strip-the-willow and dance it here and now
Lines of folk with dancing steps not guns and furrowed brow
I'd love to see your smiling face as you skip around the room
Dancing with the thrill of life, not lying here in gloom

Drift in snippet of Strip the willow Fiddle tune "Atholl Highlanders", drift out again to guitar arpeggio

Chorus x 2

9. Sausages for Tea -Story

A true story I got from my pal Anthony (well as true as any story you hear from your Irish friend after a good session on the Guinness !). I worked with Anthony from about 1990 – we had some great laughs together and I remembered the story he'd told me about the time when he played football for Blarney United, (Blarney is famous for Blarney Castle where you can “kiss the Blarney stone”) Blarney is just a wee bit outside Cork, Ireland.

Well the story goes that they won their way through to the finals in Wembley (in London, England). This was a big deal – they loved football, drinking and getting up to mischief (not necessarily in that order). So they planned the trip, they hired a bus and headed off.... One of the lads in the team looked out the window of the bus and saw his brother walking along the road they stopped the bus, the brother was asked if he wanted to go with them to Wembley (in London, England). The brother thinks that's a great idea and hops into the bus and off they go. They asked him where he was going and he said – “oh I was just going to get some sausages for me and the wife for tea (dinner to those outside Scotland & Ireland). With no thought that maybe he should just keep going to get the food for their dinner – off he went to England with his brother and his football mates ... to return a week later!

The song gives a wee bit more about what they got up to in London... it's a tidied up version of the story... I had such a laugh when Anthony told me about it. That's why it ended up in a song. The song was originally going to be called “Irish Precision Planning” which included stories of my experiences being around Irish people. The Irish folks I know generally have a great sense of humour, a willingness to try anything and an amazing ability to pull off the most amazing feats at the last minute, despite all odds, and make it look effortless. I call it Irish Precision Planning. I'm not saying that everyone would enjoy being involved in that process... but it is hilarious to watch how they make it all come together somehow.

A good example was when the Maher family were opening their new pub in Lake Oswego, Oregon. The first day open was a Saturday and it was a private event for the Irish Dancing club – which was a very large group of folks. The Mahers had bought “The Backyard Birdshop”, a great location in a great neighbourhood... but it was a birdshop, not a pub. They totally renovated the place, putting in a kitchen, pub area, restaurant, large outside patio... a very big project. I was booked to play there at 7pm and out of curiosity I dropped in at 1pm in the afternoon to see how they were doing. It was pandemonium, I was given football jerseys to hang on the walls, the place was seething with people working hard to get it ready... but I didn't think they would make it in time.

I managed to escape and headed home, when I went back to the pub later at 6pm, I couldn't believe my eyes, I'm sure the Leprechauns had paid a visit. Everything was looking great. Dave Maher, sitting on the stage screwed an electricity box into place, tested it, it worked! He looked at me and laughed... haha ! Look at that ... we can have music too!

I suppose the moral of the story is when you are amongst the Irish – expect surprises – and enjoy the fun.

Sausages for Tea - Song : Key C

Verse 1

C F C
Now Blarney United in Wembley they would play,
F C F G
We planned the trip, we hired a bus and headed off that day
F C F C
We drove toward North Chapel from Cork City we did go
G C
One boy saw his brother walking up the street below
F C F C
We stopped the bus and asked him "would you like to come with me"
G C
"Grand!, I w's getting sausages for me'n the wife for tea"
F C F C
Oh What a grand story, you couldn't make it up
G C
When Blarney United went off to win the cup

Chorus

F C F C
Toora-loora-loora, a toora loora lay
G C
A-walking down the street to get some sausages for tea

Verse 2

Well , you'll be bad in trouble his brother said to him ", "I'm not sure that she'll notice she can be a wee bit dim
One day I took the front door off and took it to get fixed, Herself came along the road and looked a bit perplexed,
"Oh how will I get in the house with no door to go through?", In a flash I said "I left the back door open just for you"
Oh What a grand story, you couldn't make it up, When Blarney United went off to win the cup

Chorus - toora-loora-loora, a toora loora lay...

Solo over Verse on Whistle for 6 lines

Oh - What a grand story, you couldn't make it up, When Blarney United went off to win the cup

Verse 3

Well we had six drink-filled days as only Irish can, We even played our football and we had an extra man
One night drinking duty-free while sitting in the bar, What was that - a disco? or a blue light on a car
Close by the Libyan Embassy was under siege and doom, Tom swears that he gassed them out by stinking up his room
Oh What a grand story, you couldn't make it up, When Blarney United went off to win the cup

Chorus x 2

A toora-loora-loora, a toora loora lay - A-walking down the street to get some sausages for tea

10. The Noise Below – Story

I suppose I struggled between the worlds of reality and imagination as a boy. This is a strange story, it's basically true (well, I added a few arms and legs to it) but it did happen and I have never talked about it. So it seemed like a good idea to write it down and spread it to the world (well to the 20 or so people who read this and listen to the album ☺).

Saturdays were great when I was a boy, sometimes we'd go swimming if my dad wasn't working or go around to the post office in Craigard road to buy comics. Dundee was famous for the three Js - Jute (for bags, sacks, carpet and linoleum backing), Jam (from local Vale of Strathmore Strawberries, Raspberries, Brambles and Blackberries. The horticultural institute was / is in Invergowrie close to us – it invented the Tayberry) and Journalism, DC Thomson was a big employer in Dundee.

We were great customers of DC Thomson every Saturday. If we had money, we'd get the Topper, the Rover and Wizard, the Hotspur, the Beezer, the Victor, the Dandy and Beano and sometimes the TV Century 21. On the day in question, we (my brother Doug and I) had a pile of comics and were enjoying lying on our beds upstairs reading our way through them.

I heard banging and crashing downstairs, my mum was out all day and my dad had been at work... it was probably him – but he wasn't normally so loud, something was up. I left my comics and warm cozy place in the afternoon sunshine, which was shining on my bed. I went downstairs to see what wrong... it was my dad, way past the cheery smile and rosy cheeks stage, he was falling about drunk, still had his working clothes on. I had never seen him so bad, he was wild eyed and grunting. I tried to speak to him, but he couldn't answer. I was scared. He wasn't violent, but he wasn't himself. He was trying to heat up some soup – when he eventually succeeded, he ate it down quickly then rushed to the sink and threw it up again. He then started shouting at me to go away. I did, I ran upstairs - what should I do?

A while went by, I tried to read my comics, but I was upset, a mixture of anger at my dad for getting himself in that state and scared because I had never seen him like that before. After a while it all went quiet downstairs and I crept out onto the landing thinking that I might go downstairs again. There he was, sitting on the bottom stairs. For some reason I found that really scary – why was he doing that, what was he up to, this wasn't like him... then anger crept in, what would mum say? why is he doing this? what is he up to? How dare he be so bad?

The annoyance / anger won, I went to our bookshelf, reached up and took the biggest book, the children's encyclopedia. I crept downstairs right behind him... and bashed him over the head with the book. He groaned and fell over on his side. I ran upstairs – shocked, amazed and scared and immediately sorry at what I'd just done. I lay on my bed waiting for something bad to happen. It never did. We never talked about it. My dad never mentioned it. He wasn't dead and had returned to normal... I kept quiet too – until now.

I lay there for an hour or more, Till it had gone quite late
At last I ventured out again, Was he down there at the gate?
Was he dead or waiting for me, I knew I couldn't run
The time had come to face up to The fate I had begun
Hey - daddilly- doo - daddily dee-daddilly -doo x2

The light was on down below, The table it was laid
My mother bustled here and there, Our dinner she had made
I sat down and began to eat, Was that a dream I'd made
My father sat and glowered at me.... A-rubbing at his head !!!!
Hey - daddilly- doo - daddily dee-daddilly -doo x2 A-rubbing at his head !!!!

11. Origins - Story

The USA is an amazing place with a huge variety of people. I have always been impressed and curious about people's stories on how they got where they are now – as apart from the Native Americans, every family came here from somewhere else.

I've played music in many States in the USA (including drunken and exhausted) and I often get people coming up to me in my break saying "I'm Scottish too! ... my mother's side was McThis and there's a McThat on my dad's side ..." they tell me the family's journey to get to the place we are and sometimes about a visit to Scotland they loved or their plans to visit. I really enjoy hearing these stories and marvel at how determined these families were to make a better life for themselves and future generations.

There's usually a point at the end of their story where they want to complete the picture and say "well, mind you, I'm Scottish, but I'm also a bit Irish, German, Polish, French, Swedish, Cherokee... (the list can be pretty long – people do the research these days)...I'm a bit of a mutt really". It's uncanny how many people have said that to me ... and look apologetic as they say it. I always react with a positive answer – as these are the people whose families have dared to leave their native land, cross the Ocean to start a new life in an unknown, foreign land. They built and populated this massive country and made it the strongest in the world. Mutts are strong folks... and should be proud of their mixed heritage – there's nothing to feel bad about.

So, this song is really for all those people I have met as I've travelled – they should see it as permission (from me anyway) to celebrate having a mixed background – be a mutt and be proud!

Origins - Song : Key C

Verse 1 (Slow)

C F C Am
I've travelled round this country playing music where I can
C F Dm G
Meeting lots of happy people who like the songs I play
Am F C F
They love to come and tell me of their heritage and clan
Em F G
But then they talk a wee bit further - this is what they say . . .

Chorus

C F G
I'm a mutt, a bit of this a bit of that,
C F G
I'm a mutt, My Polish nose - it's a wee bit flat
Am F Em F
Red Irish hair - German chin - Scots knees and Swedish ass
C F Em F
Oh - I'm nothing special ... thats what I hear you say ... HEY ...
C F G C
It's folks like you who built the U S A

Verse 2

Arrive in Ellis Island with the clothes upon your back
Sick because you're off a ship and sick because you're scared
Surrounded there by strangers - from every other land
They're hoping that you'll smile at them and give a helping hand

Chorus

Solo over chorus

Verse 3

Difference makes us stronger, it makes us better folk,
No matter if she's dark or light or if he's from the bogs,
It's love that wins out o'er us all and adds a wee bit zest,
A mutt is happy, doesn't care and lives life at its best

Chorus x2

12. Feckin Beer – Story

The Mahers are a great Irish family who live in Lake Oswego. The father Dave can turn his hand to anything and Gay (one of 18 children from Dublin) has been very successful in Irish dancing and ran a great Irish dancing school in Portland. I first met their son Mark when he opened “wee Mahers” in Lake Oswego. We had seen the story about a new Irish pub opening up and were thrilled. They had an opening celebration on the Thursday and the story sounded great, it was a small place... but it had Guinness! Brilliant. It also advertised Irish breakfast – so we headed down there on Sunday morning for a real Irish breakfast. Mark came over to us, very friendly and took our breakfast order, then asked what we’d like to drink. When I said I’d love a pint of Guinness, he looked a wee bit sheepish and, still grinning, said I’m sorry, we’re still waiting for the license to come through. We laughed and said “you’re joking!” nope, he replied, we had a special license for the opening... but our normal license is still to come.

Disappointed that there was no Guinness but impressed by the Irish/American lad who just smiled it off as pleasantly as you please, probably knowing that he’d be serving me plenty pints of it in the future. The breakfast more than made up for no Guinness... it was fantastic! I think that’s when I met the father, David, who had produced this wonderful feast with all the traditional Irish delicacies, white puddings, soda bread, Irish sausages... and much more ... the works. It was delicious – we left there stuffed with food, immediately good friends with this fine Irish family.

We had another big Irish breakfast at wee Mahers when my pal (and the other half of Keltic Fire), Feargal, came to visit. I had arranged a gig in Kells for us that night. Dave was very interested and showed up that evening with Gay, had dinner and enjoyed the music. By the time he was leaving, he had asked me to play solo in wee Mahers (Feargal was living in Barcelona, Spain), every time after that when I saw Mark, Dave or Gay, they would ask me when I was going to play there – eventually I did... and haven’t looked back.

Fast forward to September 2015, I was returning from my 1st tour of the USA, the Mahers had sold wee Mahers, bought the Backyard Birdshop along the road (great location), turned it into a thriving Irish pub with great food, drink and music, sold it and started the Feckin Brewery in Oregon City. So for my 1st appearance at the brewery, I wrote this song – I wanted to do something special for them.

The song tells of the cowboy who’s close to death having walked to the end of the Oregon trail – Oregon City. The only thing which could possibly revive him and save his life... yup, you guessed it, a pint of Feckin’ beer. The song uses the word “Feckin” quite liberally... and despite what you may think it is not a “swear word”. The Irish use it frequently as a Brit would say “flaming” or “flipping” and American might say “frigging” ... and I’m sure there are other non-expletive expletives. I’ve heard it used by Catholic priests, scholars and businessmen alike.

When I was playing this summer (2016) a man requested the song... at first I wondered if he meant the same one as I’ve only played it maybe four times since the Brewery gig ... he described it and yes, that was it. I’d played it one more time in 2015 in the Bethany pub, he’d loved it, filmed me playing it and came back to see me when I was back there. He thought it was Feckin great!!

Feckin Beer - Song : Key E

Opening 2 verses slow arpeggio

Verse 1

E B7 E B7 C#m A E B7
As I was walking through Oregon city Right at the end of the Oregon trail
E B7 E B7
I found a young cowboy sprawled out on the sidewalk
E A B7 E
He was close to his end As he looked up so frail

Verse 2 (still slow arpeggio)

I bent down to him and I said "how're you doin'?" His eyes turned to me with a look of despair
"Oh sir can you help me? For I know that I'm dying " And before I depart ... I need one Feckin beer

Chorus (rousing)

E A E F#7 B7
Oh get me one Feckin beer just one Feckin beer I've walked Feckin miles just to get here
E A E A E A E. B7 E
now I'm Feckin dying- it's so Feckin clear I'm gasping, I'm gasping for one Feckin beer

Verse 3

C#m A E
I knew what he needed, "wait there and never fear"
C#m F#7 B7
and ran down the main road, the Feckin Brewery was here
C#m A E
I explained the situation, Dave and Mark they looked quite grim
B7 E
They grabbed a Feckin growler and poured the beer right in

Chorus

Verse 4

We ran up to the cowboy still lying on the street When he saw the Feckin beer he stumbled to his feet
Mark poured out a pint glass - cold and foamy was the beer, The cowboy drank it down in one and grinned from ear
to ear

Chorus

Verse 5

We walked down to the taproom the cowboy in tow, He was still a wee bit groggy as we guided him below
The Elixir had revived him, things were looking up, He was fairly looking forward to another Feckin sup

Chorus x 2 on last line of 2nd chorus repeat last line and draw out the "one... Fe..cki...in... Beer"

13. My Little Mermaid - Story

Both of our children were born in the Netherlands and grew up there. The Netherlands is a very low and flat country, with about 26% of its area and 21% of its population located below sea level, and only about 50% of its land more than one metre above sea level. As a result, swimming lessons are essential. Both children did their swimming diplomas involving, amongst other skills, swimming underwater for long distances and swimming with clothes on. They both became very confident, competent swimmers.

Once Kyle passed his diploma A & B, he decided that he'd done enough, he stopped his lessons – which was fair enough – he was a great wee swimmer. Valerie had become a water baby – she loved it and was determined to excel. She did all her diplomas and Dorothy and I spent a *lot* of time at the poolside.

Vacations were always around water. Our kids both loved dragging their parents in with them. Dorothy isn't too fond of being jumped on in the water, so I ended up in with them for hours. Valerie put all her survival skills to use as her brother would “accidentally” sit on her, push her under, splash her, drown her, laughing all the time. He enjoyed that. Surprisingly, so did she. All the survival swimming and deep diving had turned her into a wee mermaid, totally confident, unafraid and marvelous in the water. She would dodge her brother's onslaughts and emerge laughing and squealing - a happy water baby.

Valerie continued to swim when she could and on vacation in Turkey one year, passed her open water scuba diving exam. I passed mine a year later in Bonaire so we could go diving together. We met a friendly Dutch man who turned out to be a diving master, his girlfriend didn't dive – so he needed a diving partner. He had also hired a pickup truck – so it was ideal, we drove round the island to the many dive sites, kitted up and flippered our way in – to a beautiful Caribbean underwater paradise. My memory is of Valerie swimming beside me deep in the clear blue water, brightly coloured fish curiously watching us and her doing a somersault with her long hair streaming around her like seaweed fronds, even with her mask and breathing apparatus on, her smile and sheer enjoyment was obvious.

When I visited her in 2015 in Dundee, we decided to go swimming in the new Dundee leisure centre. My own memories of Saturday morning swims with my Dad and my brother Doug came flooding back. Familiar smells of the river Tay and seaweed close by, the amplified loudness of children playing happily in an echoey pool. We swam lengths of the pool together – well she swam two for my one, gliding by, effortless tumble turns, lithe efficient long strokes – a porpoise strong at play. Feeling particularly ungainly by comparison as I trudged along, those memories of swimming with my dad were strong – his laugh, his boyish tricks and gasping as we ploughed our way through the crowded swimming pool – a broth of children. After swimming, we would always have a “shivery bite” you were cold and “shivery”, so a cup of clear, hot tasty soup (well, boiling hot, watery stock with hard salty bits in the bottom) seemed delicious.

In the satisfied, happy contentment after a good swim I knew how precious these days were with my dad and how close my kids are to me – and a degree of excitement for the future, if they have children, how they will surely love the same experience. So many happy memories, so many happy days.

My Little Mermaid – Song : Key D (played on Baritone in chord shape of G)

Verse 1

D G A D G D E7 A7
Summers in the water , Diving deep and long, Splashing up beside me, On my back and holding on
G D F#7 G D A G D
My happy water baby, Swimming with no fear at all, Comes squealing by me laughing, chasing her bouncy ball
G A D (c#) Bm G A D D7
So many happy memories, So many happy days When we sat at swimming lessons, And watched you quite amazed
G D F#7 G D A G D
Swimming underwater, Diving off the side, My own little mermaid, You filled my heart with pride

Chorus

G A D (c#) Bm Em7 A G (f#) (e) D
Swim little mermaid, swim like a fish, Time swims right by us, faster than you'd wish

Verse 2

I learned to swim in Dundee, With my father at the pool
He taught me how to swim the crawl , And he often played the fool
So many kids were swimming, Hard to swim there through a group
A shivery bite came after , Warming clear hot tasty soup
So many happy memories, So many happy days
Salt water in the swimming pool , And funny Scottish ways
Those Saturdays were lovely, With my dad and Doug
A glass of sarsperilla, And crisps outside the pub

Chorus followed by Guitar solo

Verse 3

Visiting you in Scotland, Brings both things back to me
Me - splashing up and down a pool, You - Diploma A, B and C
Now you glide right past me, A Porpoise strong at play
No more clinging happy splashing, Swim smiling far away
So many happy memories, So many happy days
When we swam on vacation, in water we would laze
Swimming underwater, Diving in Bonaire
With my little mermaid, seaweed for her hair

Chorus

Swimming underwater Diving in Bonaire
With my little mermaid , seaweed for her hair

Chorus

14. The Die is Cast - Story

This song came along just by itself. I like Johnny Cash and folks like it when I play one of his songs "Ring of Fire". I usually only do that when I can see people in the crowd might like a change from Irish and Scottish songs... but felt a need to link to my normal repertoire somehow. One day, Dorothy read that Johnny Cash's ancestors had come from a wee village in Fife, Scotland called "Strathmiglo" – we know where it is and have passed through there (it's not far from Dundee). I started using that as my excuse for playing his song.

The more I read about how his five-generation-ago relative, William Cash, got to the USA the more intrigued I became with "what happened next" type of stories. It's also funny to note that after the seafaring Uncle William Cash took his nephew, also William Cash, to the USA around 1673, young William was known as "the immigrant" by the local Virginians (so what were they? ... how times haven't changed).

I toyed around with a song which was forming in my head which was around that theme, "who would have thought that would happen?" and you never know who will emerge as a talent, a public figure, a celebrity – would uncle William, the mariner, could never have imagined his nephew's five generations-on fame? I wrote up the verse, devised the music that fitted well and that's as far as the song got for a while.

Just before we left San Diego late January 2016 to head for Florida, I was browsing around for information when I discovered that Elvis Presley's five- generation ago's relatives left Palatinate, a wine growing region in the south west of Germany and traveled to New York with about 76 other people on a ship called "The Fame" in the year 1710. My "what happened next?" interest was again aroused and soon another verse of the song was written.

I was planning on abandoning the song as I wasn't convinced it was going anywhere... and maybe it was only me who was fascinated by this. Then in early May, we arrived in Memphis and stayed in the Graceland RV park. The tour of Graceland was amazing, I had watched every Elvis film as a boy with my brother Doug in the Astoria picture house in Lochee Road, Dundee – matinees cost one shilling and threepence and we loved his films. Here in Graceland were all his personal effects, posters, records, and hundreds of awards from those days as he gave birth to rock and roll with Sun records.

The trip to Sun records studios in Memphis was fantastic. This is where rock and roll began, Elvis, Johnny Cash, Carl Perkins, Roy Orbison and many more – all recorded by Sam Philips who owned the company. This provided the inspiration for my next two verses as I discovered that Roy Orbison's five generation ago relative was Thomas Oribison, born 1715 in Lurgen, County Antrim, Ireland (the Mullens were also originally from County Antrim). He went with his parents to America where he met and married Elizabeth Miller... and all those years later Roy Orbison was born.

To tie it all together, the last verse is about how Johnny Cash, Elvis and Roy Orbison were all there together in Sun Records in Memphis with Sam Philips breaking new ground in music and influencing and inspiring generations of people. With origins of Scotland, Germany and Ireland and added flavor from many other places – they became legends – who would have thought, who would ever guess?

The Die is Cast - Song : Key C

Verse 1

C F C G
Willie was a Fifer and sailing was his life - He knew the Atlantic ocean and shores at either side
C F C E7 Am
For 50 years he sailed the seas a master of his trade Took his nephew to America across the wild waves
F C F C F C G
From Strathmiglo village holding his uncle's hand, He settled in Virginia , William Cash the immigrant
F C F C E7 A
The family grew stronger, time passed in a flash, Five generations later along came Johnny Cash

Chorus

D A E7 A D A E
Who would have thought, Who'd ever guess, Sometimes you get more, and sometimes you get less
D A E A D A (g# f#) E (f# g#) A
You're part of their future, they're part of your past, We'll all live on together - - it's how the die is cast
(g# f#) E (f# g#) A..... Am..... C

Verse 2

1710 in Germany cruel Winter killed the grape, Johannes and Anna and kids aboard the Fame
To America they travelled, arriving in New York, a new life, new language with all sorts of other folk

Merging of the Cultures in one big melting pot, Singing Musi-Den and dancing the fox-trot
French, Scottish, Irish - - and Cherokee, All poured in together to Elvis Presley

Chorus

Verse 3

Thomas came from Lurgan, County Antrim, Emerald Isle, Across the wide Atlantic to Philadelphia he sailed
He met Lizzy Miller from Newcastle, Delaware, And settled down together a new life there to share

The family flourished, with many babies they were blessed, Oklahoma, PA, Texas with economy depressed,
Music was the answer for their seven year old son, His gifts just came flowing out of Roy Orbison

Chorus

Verse 4

Sun Records grew in Memphis with Sam Phillips in the chair, He scraped together business recording what he could
One day when Gospel music was more than he could stand, Elvis sang out "That's all right" - that's how it all began

Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash , Roy Orbison , Three European travelers five generations on
All met together playing songs no one had done, Recording there in Memphis in the Banner of the Sun

9. Chorus x 2,

on last line of last chorus, [A (g# f#) E]“ it’s how the die is cast”, [A (g# f#) E]“how the die is cast, [A (g# f#) E]
that’s how the die is cast” [A (g# f#) E], [... E, (f# g#) A] “the die is cast”

15. Paper Wings - Story

Paper Wings was one of the first songs I started working on and was the one I finished last. I couldn't get it to work. I knew what I wanted from it. It was about my mum and it was to be soft and gentle, like her. I rewrote it many times, changed the music but eventually decided to abandon it and wrote the upbeat "And We Sang" instead as a tribute to her. So, happy that my mum had a song on the album – even if it wasn't the one that still bubbled around in my head – I was ready to stop there with fifteen songs.

One day when I was sitting playing my guitar, just playing odd bits of songs – Dorothy said – "oh that's a beautiful one, what one's that?" It was the tune of Paper Wings. I thought, well, if the tune gets the "Dorothy seal of approval", I should have one last look at it. With fresh eyes and a wish to capture the concept I had in my head, I rewrote it completely in about two hours – and felt a sigh of relief, I had done it and it had the feel I wanted.

So "why paper wings?" I felt it captured my mum's delicate, soft, gentle, flitting by and around you, always aware of you, always sensing what was going on, it was somehow right, and...

This is a bit of a hard story to tell ... and I haven't told it to many. It comes from my mum's death in July 2014. She had reached the end of her life, she knew it and was at peace with it. A final lung infection just wouldn't lift, she wasn't eating and began to slip away. My brother Doug and I were both there in the Wellburn nursing home in Dundee, run by the Little Sisters of the Poor, an order of Catholic nuns set up by Saint Jeanne Jugan.

After a peaceful evening at her bedside, the lighting was soft, she was in her bed, Sister Veronica (head of patient care) was at the foot of the bed, Sister Alice (the French novice nun who looked after my mum) beside her, the senior nurse and her assistant were beside Sister Alice, Doug and I were seated beside my mum. The nuns would pray softly out loud every so often, the familiar rhythm of the prayers we all knew so well from childhood on, soothing, helping. That was how my mum passed away peacefully.

The prayers and tears continued and Doug and I stood up from the bedside. As we stood around praying, I spotted a little common paper winged moth appearing from the far side of my mum's head. I had never seen one in the room before. It fluttered into the air and flew in its erratic mothy way over and landed on each person in turn, then floated down to the bed beside my mum's shoulder.

I wondered if that was my mum saying goodbye, my dad saying thank you... or, just a moth.

That night's events will remain etched in my memories for as long as I'm around, the fluttering little moth too – fragile, gentle, delicate, purposeful touching everyone in the room. My mum.

I haven't swatted a moth since.

Paper Wings - Song : (Key D Capo at 2nd fret - play C)

Dm G7 Dm G7
Patrick came to Glasgow, He left his Dublin trails,
Dm G7 C Cmaj7 C
A job with Scottish railway Horse saddles to the rails

Lonely and unmarried, British Army on his mind
Stern Annie stopped her frowning, As he treated her quite kind

Chorus

Dm G C (b) Am
Paper wings... Appeared and touched us ; Paper wings... Removed my fear
(g) Bsomething G
Paper wings... You'll always be with me - and whisper in my ear
Dm G C (b) Am Dm G C Cmaj7 C
Paper wings... You flutter in us ; I'm happy that you do No matter what I have to face I'll always be with you

They married in St Mungos, A little bit moonstruck,,
Then along came baby Margaret, They couldn't believe their luck

This little girl was precious, As bright as shining sun
Their princess captured all their love,, She was their only one

Chorus

Margaret grew to Rita, Rita met her Bill,
Two hearts joined together, They'd be together still

This clever Glasgow lassie, A teacher she became
The lucky children in her class, Imagination set aflame

Chorus

Whistle Solo over chorus

But time just passes quickly , And stroked her as it past,
Bill went off quite suddenly, And left us all downcast

She lived for 10 years further, And prayed hard every day
for the time she'd have to say goodbye, And flutter far away

Chorus x 2

16. Write It Down - Story

I've known Steve and Cathi Behrens since 2010. Steve runs the Celtic music promotion company 67 music and his wife Cathi is just great – she supports Steve and makes things happen too. They have become good friends. As well as meeting up at the various gigs and celebrations, we have a business get-together every year to take stock of where I am, what I'm doing and where I'm going musically.

So there we were, August 22nd 2015 in the Loyal Legion brew pub in the south east of Portland. The beer it sells is all brewed in Oregon and it does a delicious menu of sausages and mustard. On a hot, sunny Portland Saturday it was a great place to be. We talked about all sorts of things and then got on to my future plans. They were asking me why I don't try to do my own songs. It was a fairly easy answer, I didn't have any.

Through the years I have thought and dreamed about writing songs. I have even sat down a few times to do it. It's hard. My problems were many – boiling down to the fact that I was self-conscious and embarrassed by everything I'd written. I also found it very hard to create original tunes – there have been so many songs written, it's hard not to find another song's melody tied up in your new masterpiece.

Steve and Cathi persisted, not believing I couldn't do it. I found myself saying I have stories – but it's hard to fit them into songs, there so much to say... and who would want to listen to my songs. No-one will know what I'm singing about. Their advice was don't try to say everything, people will be interested, do what you normally do when you perform – have a catchy chorus – it always feels better when people sing along.

Then they asked about some of my ideas ... it turned out I had quite a few but not well enough formed to make a song– the Portland beer really helped! They listened as I rambled on. Their answer and number one piece of advice was – Write It Down! You'll just forget it if you don't, keep a note pad handy and write it down before it's gone. With some of the stories I told them, I became emotional (again that Portland beer is good!) – I should keep that strong feeling alive – people will feel it and be attracted to the songs.

I knew that they were right, they were telling me things I had already thought I should be doing – but somehow just didn't do them. It really helped to have this session to just solidify my resolve to start writing songs and I decided that my next album would be a fully original one and I committed to doing it. We all left the pub happy and energized... and full of sausages and mustard and pints of Portland beer.

My plan was to start writing songs when we got to San Diego which was after our trip back to Scotland in November for my 60th birthday on November 8th– with a big party arranged for Saturday 7th. The trip to Scotland was pretty good, we flew from San Francisco after a great few days with friends there and arrived in time for Guy Fawkes day – November 5th. During the night after my birthday when my body was still recovering from the party on the 7th and the cakes and goodies on the 8th and the jetlag... I kept waking up during the night – and each time I had a tag- line for a song or a new song idea in my head... so what did I do? I reached over the side of the bed, opened “notes” on my iPad and “wrote it down!”. By morning I had 10 solid ideas and a couple of others to form up a bit more. During my time in San Diego, I became a song writer... I Wrote It Down Steve and Cathi!



