

So Near, So Far

By Arthur Davenport

Came rolling down the highway, with a goal jammed in my mind.
Looking for some old friends, and a chance to just unwind.
Down the road and over the valley, to the mountain far behind.
My life has played I've wandered there, through the misty shrouds of time.

The fields of corn and clover, harsh scream the old black crows.
I feel the land so green beneath me start to climb and rise away,
I got a feeling deep within me that I'm going home today.
Yea, I'm going home today.

And the house it still stands beautiful, not too fancy, not too plain.
I go inside, and ghosts surround me, it's a funny sort of pain.
Coming back to a place that's made me, I done a lot to make it too.
But now it belongs to all those people, so near, yet so far from you,
so near, yet so far from you.

And the ghosts fly all around me, leaving memories on my mind.
I let the spirits of the old days bring my soul with them through time.
And I see the sights of summer haven't changed while I'm away.
But the people there, they're all the same, and it's only me that's changed.
Yes, it's only me that's changed.

Coming back to a place that's made me, I done a lot to make it too...
But now it belongs to all those people,
so near yet so far from you, so near yet so far from you,
so near yet so far from you, so near, so far, from you.

© 2002 Arthur Davenport, Good Read Music LLC, from the album
"Reality Bends" (www.arthurdavenport.com)

Thanks for the Support

By Roy Zimmerman

You've got that yellow ribbon stuck on your H2 - Thanks for the support.
Memorial Day weekend you threw a barbeque - Thanks for the support.

I can feel the love seven thousand miles away,
And I'm a patriot, as I was trying to say,
When you cut me short - Thanks for the support

I was gunning for Osama, and you sent me for Saddam - Thanks for the support.
Now I'm sitting down to dinner; it's another can of Spam - Thanks for the support.

You say: "Complete the mission", and I say: "Count on me!"
'Cause I don't even know what mission there might be
To abort - Thanks for the support.

You sent me here a third time, and my house was repossessed - Thanks for the support.
Now my wife is in a trailer, but she sent a Kevlar vest - Thanks for the support.

And I think of her only every time I bleed,
Someday we will meet again at Walter Reed;
The resort of last resort - Thanks for the support

And you hired those mercenaries who make eight times what I do - Thanks for that.
And you dropped in on Thanksgiving with a turkey and a camera crew - Thanks-giving.

Now you're giving guns to the ones who shot at me.
The tank is full, but the strategy might be
Down a quart - Thanks for the support

I appreciate the stopgap, and I appreciate the Surge - Thanks for the support.
Another twenty thousand voices to harmonize this dirge - Thanks for the support.

To the Democratic Congress who could have brought me home
must have come down with a new Gulf War Syndrome
Of some sort - Thanks for the support.

And if I die tomorrow, won't you ship me home at night - Thanks for the support.
And if I have a funeral, make sure it's outta sight - Thanks for the support.

In the final seconds you've got a plan to win;
Cut those taxes and let Jesus put one in
From half-court - Thanks for the support.

© 2008 Roy Zimmerman, from the album
"Thanks for the Support" (www.royzimmerman.com)

The Letters of Florence Hemphill

By Joe Crookston

I came back home to Wilson County
In the gold Kansas Plains
From the gutted hills of France
And the cold muddy rain

I still think about the sisters
Cigarettes and English tea
And the barbed wire and trenches
Things we never thought we'd see

And in the rumbling battle noise
We took care of the boys
So they wouldn't die alone
And we could send them back home
When the midnight whistle blew
I donned my boots and navy blue
But anyhow
That's all over now

Jimmy Clellan was a piper
They brought him in from No Man's Land
And I fed him the ripest berries
And I saved his one good hand
And that red-head with the photograph
As I wrapped up his eyes
If he got home to West Virginia
I knew he'd never see his bride

And in the rumbling battle noise
We took care of the boys
So they wouldn't die alone
And we could send them back home
When the midnight whistle blew
I donned my boots and navy blue
But anyhow
That's all over now

All the sleepless nights we spent
And all the letters came and went
And all the British girls and I
We lost some but we tried

We lay down in the bracken fern
To make it through we had to learn
About the broken and the torn
Mending lives and staying warm

Coming home to the prairie gold
With a story that I told
In the rumbling battle noise
We took care of the boys

I came back home to Wilson County
In the gold Kansas Plains
From the gutted hills of France
And the cold muddy rain

© 2016 Joe Crookston (www.joecrookston.com)

*A 2016 collaboration between Joe Crookston and the National World War I Museum
in Kansas City, Missouri.*

Was It You?

(By Robert W. Service, recited by U. Utah Phillips)

"Hullo, young Jones! with your tie so gay
And your pen behind your ear;
Will you mark my cheque in the usual way?
For I'm overdrawn, I fear."
Then you look at me in a manner bland,
As you turn your ledger's leaves,
And you hand it back with a soft white hand,
And the air of a man who grieves. . . .

"Was it you, young Jones, was it you I saw
(And I think I see you yet)
With a live bomb gripped in your grimy paw
And your face to the parapet?
With your lips asnarl and your eyes gone mad
With a fury that thrilled you through. . . .
Oh, I look at you now and I think, my lad,
Was it you, young Jones, was it you?

"Hullo, young Smith, with your well-fed look
And your coat of dapper fit,
Will you recommend me a decent book
With nothing of War in it?"
Then you smile as you polish a finger-nail,
And your eyes serenely roam,
And you suavely hand me a thrilling tale
By a man who stayed at home.

"Was it you, young Smith, was it you I saw
In the battle's storm and stench,
With a roar of rage and a wound red-raw
Leap into the reeking trench?
As you stood like a fiend on the firing-shelf
And you stabbed and hacked and slew. . . .
Oh, I look at you and I ask myself,
Was it you, young Smith, was it you?

"Hullo, old Brown, with your ruddy cheek
And your tummy's rounded swell,
Your garden's looking jolly chic
And your kiddies awf'ly well.
Then you beam at me in your cheery way
As you swing your water-can;
And you mop your brow and you blithely say:
'What about golf, old man?'

"Was it you, old Brown, was it you I saw
Like a bull-dog stick to your gun,
A cursing devil of fang and claw
When the rest were on the run?
Your eyes aflame with the battle-hate. . . .
As you sit in the family pew,
And I see you rising to pass the plate,
I ask: Old Brown, was it you?"

"Was it me and you? Was it you and me?
(Is that grammar, or is it not?)
Who groveled in filth and misery,
Who gloried and groused and fought?
Which is the wrong and which is the right?
Which is the false and the true?
The man of peace or the man of fight?
Which is the ME and the YOU?"

From the album "I've Got to Know" (www.utahphillips.com)

Johnnie's Coming Home

By George Mann

He went off to serve in Vietnam, so many years since he's been gone
And I waited, I waited all of this time
I stayed at home, fought against that war
Once on the news I thought I saw him marching
Marching in the Anzac lines

And I cried, Johnnie's coming home

Tossed into an American war, they drew marbles from a Tattersalls barrel
Then they went off to fight, and some went off to die
We tried hard just to save our sons, but for all of those boys it had just begun
And it lingered, and hung like dead fruit on the vine

Still I cried, Johnnie's coming home
And I prayed, Johnnie's coming home

Next I knew it was '73, a letter came, said "Forget about me
I am not the man that you'd want me to be..."
For forty years I kept hoping we'd meet
I'd see so many ghosts shuffling down the street
I kept turning my head for a glimpse of that face so sweet

And I cried, Johnnie won't you come home?
And I prayed, Johnnie won't you come home?

And I know you still feel ashamed
But I know that you boys aren't to blame

Just yesterday I was sweeping the floor, a soft knock came on my front door
An old man standing there as I opened it wide
Well he fell in my arms as the tears rolled down
And he held on so tight as he swung me around
And I said "Welcome home, won't you please come inside?"

And I cried, "Johnnie you have come home
After all this time, Johnnie you have come home..."

© 2016 George Mann, from the album

"For the Road and the Sky" (www.georgemann.org)

For John and Shelley, Thirroul, Australia (2/18/16)

He Called Me Dad

By David Rovics

I grew up in Lawrence, there by the water
In the shadow of a textile mill
Sometimes I feel just like that building
Empty but standing there still
I liked the President, I liked the union
I believed in the Rights of Man
So I signed up when it was time to fight Hitler
And they sent me off to Japan

I couldn't describe it, it was all just so bad
I kept my head down, tried to stay alive
I got shot in the leg, took me out of the action
So I was lucky enough to survive
I came home from the war, met a good woman named Maria
We had ourselves a son
When I first saw Jim's face, the first thing I thought
I hope he never has to carry a gun

It was a long time ago, another life that I had
A little boy who called me dad

I'd have terrible dreams of my time overseas
But otherwise life was alright
I had a job and a wife and a fine little lad
With eyes so cheery and bright
When his number came up I said let's move up north
To Halifax, what do you say?
But my Jim wouldn't have it, he said if I'm gonna be drafted
I don't want to run away

Chorus

After just a few months the letters stopped coming
And one morning a knock on the door
Two nervous young men handed me a flag
Said your son died in the war
He gave his life for his country was what the man said
He didn't believe it and neither did I
I closed the front door, dropped the flag on the floor
And I sat down in Jim's room and cried

Chorus

It was less than a year when my wife said to me
You look so much like our little Jim
She had to go, I don't blame her, you know
I also remind me of him
Now it's been forty years, I'd be a grandpa by now
But instead I just sit here alone
No one calls much these days, but anytime the phone rings
I think maybe the boy's coming back home

Chorus

© 2011 David Rovics, from the album
"Meanwhile in Afghanistan" (www.davidrovics.com)

Kigali

By Jon Brooks
(For Sen. Romeo Dallaire)

Grandpa was a Vandoo in '25.
He left Groesbeek in '45.
Grandma was a Dutch girl and a war bride.
And my dad, like his dad, came home quiet.
He loved us with few words.
To know him I had to become him.
I left Somalia for a new 'Chapter Six.'
Was discharged in '94 from Amahoro barracks
but I don't know the way.
I don't know the way
home from Kigali.
Does your heart know the way?
Does any heart know the way home from Kigali?'

Ecstasy and Zolofit helped turn
landmine rings back to cell phones
and Linda back home to her parents.
I tripped up the '12 Steps' to fall back down.
I joined a prayer group
though I know I cannot be found.
One night I asked Jesus if He knew the way.
I was drunk at last call but I swore I heard Him say:
'I don't know the way
I don't know the way
home from Kigali.'
Does your heart know the way?
Does any heart know the way home from Kigali?'

In black light, in back rooms, down Ste. Catharine
into that soft abyss
under the weight of a naked stranger.
Between dances she lies back on me,
I smell her hair and her unknown skin
I brush dry lips along.
Then she smiles that sad smile
of all souls astray;
I want to ask her
but I know she'd say:
'No, I don't know the way
I don't know the way
home from Kigali.'
Does your heart know the way?
Does any heart know the way home from Kigali?'

If Jimmy Didn't Have to Go

By Charlie King

Got married in a hurry and we had us a son back in 1973
I was drafted at the end of the Vietnam War, though I never did go overseas
But I remember the look on the ones who came back
Their faces still haunt me so
And I made myself a promise I would do what it takes
So Jimmy didn't have to go

Chorus:

If Jimmy didn't have to go
There's nothing I wouldn't do
That boy means the world to me
He ought to mean the world to you
I don't know why we throw lives away
And come home with nothing to show
I only know I would sell me soul
If Jimmy didn't have to go

I went from the Army to the Army reserves
There's nothing that moves I can't fix
I didn't think much about it just a weekend warrior
Then I turned 36
And they called me in and they shipped me out
I'm thinking now I could have said no
But I whispered to Cathy we would finish it early
So Jimmy didn't have to go (Repeat Chorus)

They said it wouldn't come to hand to hand
Though the border's just a mile away
But the enemy surprised us from behind
Guess they were running back the other way
Guess they were looking for a place to hide
Guess they were looking a place they'd know
Wondering what they hell they were doing there
And why they ever had to go (Repeat Chorus)

I killed a soldier with a silent knife
I pulled him down on top of me
I looked into the eyes looking back into mine
He couldn't have been 17
I held him as he died so quiet
I held him as he died so slow
I held him 'til I knew that it wasn't enough
That Jimmy didn't have to go

They sent me up for court martial
'Cause I wouldn't do a thing I was told
Their lawyer said I was a coward
Mine said I was just too old
But it wasn't the fear of the bombs above
Or the fear of the gas below
I'm afraid to meet the eyes of the Iraqi father
Whose Jimmy had to go.

If his Jimmy didn't have to go
There's nothing I wouldn't do
That boy means the world to me now
He ought to mean the world to you
I don't know why we throw lives away
And come home with nothing to show
I only know there's a time to say no
And Jimmy didn't have to go

© 1991 Charlie King, Pied Asp Music, BMI, from the album
"So Far, So Good" (www.charlieking.org)

One Piece At A Time

By Joe Jencks

Verse 1

Hoping for a new start
Trying to find my way
A little bit of rebellion mixed with
Adventure far away
A family tradition
To honor and to serve
The call of duty
Now I'm down to my last nerve

Chorus

Does anybody see me
Does anybody know what I've been through
Some folks gave their lives all at once
But I've given up my life
One piece at a time

Verse 2

I had a job, I did it well
Tried to trust the chain of command
What in the world was I thinking
Now I walk among the damned
Living on the edge of life and death
You know it takes it's toll
The loss of innocence
No stability, no control

Chorus

Does anybody see me
Does anybody know what I've been through
Some folks gave their lives all at once
But I've given up my life
One piece at a time

Bridge

Well I second-guess my choices
I "woulda, coulda, shoulda" all the time
But on sleepless nights, that doesn't help
To find a reason or a rhyme

Verse 3

Picking up the pieces
Honoring the dead
Not much here I understand
And there's a war inside my head

But I am not expendable
I'm still living with the pain
Yes, there are ways that I survived
But I'm dying every day

Chorus

Does anybody see me
Does anybody know what I've been through
Some folks gave their lives all at once
But I've given up my life
One piece at a time

Verse 4

Believing that the future
Holds more power than the past
I reach with forgiveness
For a new life I hope will last
So put a candle in the window
Help me see I'm not alone
Though I have changed, I need to know
I'm finally welcome home

Chorus x 2

Does anybody see me
Does anybody know what I've been through
Step by step and day by day I find
I'm taking back my life
One piece at a time

© 2014, 2016 Joe Jencks – Turtle Bear Music, ASCAP, from the upcoming album
"Poets, Philosophers, Workers, & Wanderers" (www.joejencks.com)
Words written for and with the Spokane "Warrior's Heart to Art" participants.
Music by Joe Jencks.

Where Have They All Gone?

By Greg Artzner and Terry Leonino

Where have they all gone?
The ones we sent across the sea
To do the bidding of powerful
To kill for you and me

Where are their lonely coffins draped with our country's flag?
Where are the ones on stretchers and in black body bags?

Can we ever know
The price that they have paid
For someone else's barter
Their loyalty betrayed

Where have they all gone?
The ones who lost a leg, a hand
Their young life forever altered
In a far-off, oil-rich land

And the ones forever haunted by the horrors they have seen
Is this the price of liberty, just what does freedom mean?

Can we ever know
The price that they have paid
For someone else's barter
Their loyalty betrayed

Why does our lady liberty stand trembling in fear?
Deaf and blind and silent she won't speak or see or hear
They hide from us the suffering, the agony, the pain
They hide from us the violence that they do in our name

Where have they all gone?
Dying soldiers by the score
And among the suffering innocent
Are many thousands more

The widow and the orphan
Will bear the lifelong toll
The bloody stain of corporate gain
Forever scars our soul

Can we ever know
The price that we have paid
For someone else's barter
Our loyalty betrayed
Our loyalty betrayed

Poor Richard's Blues

By George Mann

One more drop of water, splashed upon my face
The days are getting shorter, but they accumulate
I guess it's time, here today, that I plan my getaway
For I know I'm going home

One more drop of water, perhaps some saving grace
Skin's too hard for needles, but my jaw's set firm in place
I guess it's time, here today, I have planned my getaway
And I know I'm going home
Shut it off, shut it down, too much ugliness around
I can handle this alone

They took away my life and now they're coming for my soul
They never gave me any chance to choose
But I remember everything and I'm still in control
So I will call this warning "Poor Richard's Blues..."
I'll sing to you
Poor Richard's Blues

Swooping down to save them, an angel from the sky
But they choked on the same dust I kicked up that filled my lungs and eyes
I was loyal, I was true, but they did what powers do
And they'd do the same to you again
They could lock me in a cage, take away my finest days
But they couldn't beat me 'til the end

One more drop of water, and soon I will be free
Free of all this poison and hatred that they put inside of me
Guess it's time, here today, I have planned my getaway
And I know I'm going home
Shut it off, shut it down, I surrender to the ground
I have always gone down alone
I have always gone alone

© 2013 George Mann, from the album

"Portraits" (www.georgemann.org)

For C. Richard Bauer, Ithaca, NY (11/14/13)

Korea

A story by Utah Phillips

© 1996 words by Utah Phillips, music by Ani DiFranco, from the album
“The Past Didn’t Go Anywhere” (www.righteousbabe.com)

Let Them In

By John Gorka

Let them in, Peter
They are very tired
Give them couches where the angels sleep
And light those fires
Let them wake whole again
To brand new dawns
Fired by the sun not wartime's
bloody guns
May their peace be deep
Remember where the broken bodies lie
God knows how young they were
To have to die
God knows how young they were
To have to die

Give them things they like
Let them make some noise
Give roadhouse bands not golden harps
To these our boys
And let them love, Peter
For they've had no time
They should have trees and bird songs
And hills to climb
The taste of summer in a ripened pear
And girls sweet as meadow wind
With flowing hair
Tell them how they are missed
and say not to fear
It's gonna be alright
With us down here

Let them in, Peter

© 1997 John Gorka, from the album
"The Company You Keep" (www.johngorka.com)
Based on a poem by Elma Dean