

Explanation: I had the opportunity for awhile to direct three youth choirs (named Cherubs, Crusaders, and New Sound). Sometimes I recorded original songs and dropped the tapes off at the houses of the youth and children. When typing the lyrics though, I found there was half a page empty. So I began writing stories to fill the space.

Excerpts From My Journeys

November 8 is Here!

A fine hello, and all the best to you from everyone I've seen on my recent adventure to the Willamee Mountains. Time has flown, and here it is almost November 8 already. So I packed away my dusty road guitar and warmed up the keys on my synthesizer. Yup, it's time for a little music to break out into the open. 'Course I need you to help me. As Old Jumbuggy says, "A choir ain't a choir without the choir." So I'm hoping to see you this Sunday morning for eggs and cornbread butterpickens... oops, for a minute I thought I was back on the Links of Loquosset: what breakfasts they have there... I mean, I'm hoping to see you this Sunday morning for sing-a-long at the front steps. Be there or be somewheres else! But you know which one I'd prefer. Thanks and all. See you!

Your friend on the dusty back trails, Steve.

Grand Notice To All Cherubs

Hi to all my friends from all the people who live at Singing Junction on the Western Sea. It's beautiful out here, and it's a great place to write music without being disturbed. I set my synthesizer up on a marble walkway overlooking the Blue Dawn Harbor. The wind was warm and all the flags on the towers here at the Marble Street Manor were gently rippling in the breeze. Two sailboats were putting out to sea, and I could hear the captain of one of them singing across the calm waters. I took off my headphones and just listened until his voice was far away, lost in the cry of distant gulls and whispers from the surf. Too magic a moment to bend or break, I stayed until the headwaiter found me some hours later. As dinner had already been served at the Manor, he invited me to his lakeside villa, and we sat by the fire while our homemade corn fritters baked into a golden brown with just a touch of being burned on the edges. Time, of course, moved on and so I thought I'd remind you that we are scheduled to sing this week in church. Have a great weekend, and I hope to see you all on Sunday in the bright morning!

Your friend by the calm sea, Steve.

Message to Crusaders and New Sound Members

Hi, hey, hello again from the "back forty" where Farmer John Winters and I have been digging up tree stumps from his new pasture. Though I try to live simply on these musical journeys, sometimes I stop and work a few days so as not to empty my pockets completely. So Farmer John took me in for awhile, and I've enjoyed the quiet rural

landscape, the lonely November fields, and moments for reflection alongside endlessly laughing brooks. It's good for my spirit to be out here away from the rush of humanity. Nature seems to have its own pace, you know.

Farmer John lives on the borders of the Misty Purple Mountains, and surprisingly close to White Stone Hollow. Strange stories have come from this section of the deep woods, rumors of dances on the "misty lawn," whatever that is, and bits of music have sometimes been heard even out here when the wind is right. Still, I haven't heard any myself, but it does make one wonder.

The food here is good, especially after a few hours in the fields, and the books we read by the fire at night tell wonderful tales from years ago in these parts. If the stories are true then this is sure a magic place to dream and sing and live. And to think I never would have stopped here if unexpected expenses hadn't convinced me to look for a bit of work.

Time always passes quicker than seems possible, and here we are ready to sing again this Sunday morning. By then I'll have waved goodbye to the Winters and the Misty Purple Mountains, and the little puppy they call "Bumper Crop," and this episode will be like another leather-bound volume on the bookshelf of my mind. I'll look to see you this Sunday. All the best to you till then, and I hope your stories will someday be as bright as the ones I read by the fire at Farmer John's.

From along the quiet brooks, your friend, Steve.

Notice to Cherubs and Crusaders

My how time flies, and so does the snow when it's driven by the wind. I've seen a bit of it lately up here in the coves and villages of Naramew Point, a cozy little island just off the north shore. It's a nice place to settle down for a little while, catch up on my correspondence, and enjoy this very special season. I'm on the fourth floor of the Grand View Hotel, looking out across Main Street and down the hill to the little schoolhouse, then the river, and finally the docks and the harbor. But my favorite place of all is the little church down the street. Can you believe it? It has an old cast-iron wood stove to keep everyone warm, and the minister chops the wood himself. I saw him one day, and right then and there decided to buy an axe and lend him a hand. That's why I've seen so much snow lately, for we've spent many an afternoon splitting up logs and chopping down a "big one" now and again. Then we would call it a day, and go inside for hot tea and biscuits. Quite often we sit down right there by the woodstove, and read from the Christmas story in Matthew or Luke. Pastor Ben, (I've never heard his last name), has become quite a friend to me in just this short time. He's a wonderful listener, and wanted to know all about my "musical adventures" and all the people I've met on my travels. He sort of has a way of understanding people, and has helped to put my own experiences into perspective. I know I'll always remember him.

The town is bright with lights and filled with the sounds of laughter and carolers singing just outside the Sweet Shoppe. I think that's because the owner, Mr. Freedleston, keeps a

handy supply of Mint Swirl Cookies and Gingerbread on hand and shares it with anyone who comes to sing outside his store. Almost every night someone is down there singing, and last evening a brass group from across the island stopped by to play. I stood in the cold snow while the music warmed my heart. And the just-out-of-the-oven Gingerbread Man helped a bit too. I ate it during "O Holy Night," but the Mint Swirl cookie I saved for Pastor Ben.

Hope your Christmas is "calm and bright,"

Your friend outside the Sweet Shoppe, Steve.

Where February Found Me

The February thaw at Cricktucket Falls caused quite an unexpected stir, at least for a newcomer like me. Having spent a couple weeks in Warbleston Village during the cold weeks in January, I didn't expect a sudden warm spell to break the ice on the Slalom Rock River, but that's just what happened. This doesn't occur very often, but once in a while it does, and then the mayor declares a holiday and all the young boys (and a few hardy old-timers as well) hammer rafts together out of fireplace logs and race down the river to Elmsfoot Lodge. Oh what fun it was, standing there cheering and drinking hot chocolate, and laughing as one after another fell off his raft into the knee-deep water, then climbed on top again and floated on down the river, paddling as fast as possible with fireplace shovels and tongs, for those are the only paddles allowed in the race which has been a tradition time out of mind.

Quite a crowd gathered down at the footbridge where the race officially ends. That's where the mayor stands with the Cricktucket crowns, one for the winner, who is crowned King Slalom Rock, and one for Old Buster, the Elmsfoot Lodge Bull Terrier, who always has his picture in the paper with the winner, though nobody I talked to could remember why. It's just a part of the history of the place.

This year the race was so close it was almost a tie, but Mr. Tredder's raft hit a rock by the bridge, and though he crossed the finish line first, it was little Peter Kendle who first crossed with a raft under his feet, and so he won the crown, and everyone cheered and said it was the best race since Bubba Tompkins raft fell apart and he won the race floating on a large chunk of ice. Most of the participants were quite wet by this time, and they went into the lodge to dry off. I had watched the race so as to avoid such a predicament, but the photographer's flash made Old Buster jump into the river, and when he climbed out he shook himself off right next to me. So I took a look around the lodge myself. If you're ever in the area, stop in. And be sure and save a dinner roll for Old Buster.

See you on February 14, and a Happy Valentine's Day.

Your friend in the lodge, Steve.

Turning The Corner

The dawn found me walking along the shores of Crystal Canyon Park. It isn't my usual way to get up this early, but a spring morning is hard to resist, especially after a long, white, snow-filled winter. I knew it was also the turning point for my musical travels, and now I was heading back to the place where it all began, Old Jumbo's cabin, and from there just down the lane and along the high grassy meadows until the roads begin to take on familiar names again, and then the old front porch swing and the sound of the key in the lock and the joy of home. All of this went through my mind as I paused to reflect in the cool of the morning.

By ten o'clock I was through the park and on up to the high road where a kind farmer gave me a lift in to town on the back of his hay wagon. Little Fork Falls was the name of the place, and I had a wonderful hot lunch in the diner. Still I had miles to go, and the afternoon sun found me whistling as I walked. I had planned to make it all the way to Winderburg, but wouldn't you know, I walked by a small country school just as the children were let out. They began to play an interesting game using three balls and a few stone markers. At first I couldn't figure out what they were doing, but they were having a good time, and just when I thought I was beginning to catch on, they would suddenly stop, change the teams and start over. I watched for quite a while till one by one they began to go home, and I thought perhaps it was getting time for me to move along too. But by then the old school teacher had seen me, and he invited me to his house for dinner if I were "getting a bit hungry," as he put it. It had been some hours since the diner, so I figured it might be a good idea, and my stomach seconded it right away.

The man's name was Kurt Frederickton, and with his white beard and silver cane he looked like a pretty good Santa Claus. He also had a small guest house in the back which he called "The Shack," but everyone else around called it "The Teapot" because the chimney comes out at an angle and looks a little like a spout with steam coming out. When "Grandpa Kurt" found out about my travels, he asked me to stay a couple days and teach the kids a few music lessons in the school. Those few days turned into something like three weeks, and I should probably write a book about it. Oh what fun we had! And the little concert we did for the parents and friends was the funniest collection of stories and songs I've ever heard. The town laughed for days, and I laughed too, though by that time I was whistling and walking along roads that grew warmer and warmer as spring turned on its charm. Hope your weather is turning the corner too, and I hope to see all the Cherubs in church Sunday morning for this week's song. Bye till then.

Your friend in the wide open country, Steve.

To All My Friends In Cherubland

Hi there and greetings from the mud flats just outside Billy Boy State Park on the west edge of Panda Bear Island. Yes, we're talking mud. Mud in your boots, your socks, and up to about the knees of your pants! It's the annual "Slosh To The Wash," as they say, but what it really means is you walk through the mud till you get to the sea where it all

washes off. All the kids here love it, and so do a bunch of the dads, but the moms are generally not in favor and have frequently voiced their objection in the town meetings. Of course it doesn't do much good, because the only ones allowed to vote on the matter are those who have been on the most recent "Slosh Walk" themselves, and so the moms always get outvoted by the kids, which takes care of that. The kids also like voting, and since this is the only subject in town where they have a say, they all show up at the Spring meeting every year, and all the town council gets to hear four, five, and six-year-olds extolling the virtues of mud in its many forms. The council listens very intently and asks questions like "How did you feel when you fell down in it?" or "What does it sound like when you pull your foot up but your boot stays stuck in the mud?" Then of course comes the secret ballot voting, and Mayor Bilkesmire reads them off one at a time while the secretary keeps a running total on the blackboard. Mayor Bilkesmire knows the tradition will be carried by a landslide, but to heighten the atmosphere he adds in a few extra "No" votes from absentee ballots he saves for just this event. The kids watch with expectancy, hoping against hope that the "Slosh To The Wash" will continue as long as they live, and when the final tally is reached you should hear the noise and the celebration. They cheer and hug each other and throw lots of confetti. Then the kids are dismissed by the council, and those remaining just sit there and laugh for about the next half hour. They know it's the happiest town meeting all year. I'm really glad I could be here to see it just once, even if I did lose one of my boots during the walk. Hope to see you Sunday morning with no mud on your shoes. Bye till then.

Your friend with one boot, Steve.

Almost Home

The wind was gentle and soft, coming across the bay to the little harbor at Cliffport, so the captain of the "Coconut Islander" said it was time to go. And that's just what we did - sailed away from the coast and down through the Coconut Islands, as they are now called. It was a beautiful trip, with so much color and sun that I almost wished it would never end. But I knew when the boat finally landed at Bubble Creek Quarry, my friends, the Peepeloes, would be waiting for me, and maybe even Old Jumbo himself. My thoughts turned to him often in the quieter moments on the water, for it was he who first told me of his own musical adventures years before, and those tales from yesteryear sparked the flame that eventually made me pack up a few belongings, close the door of my own home, and set off down the unknown trails. There was so much now I wanted to tell him.

The Coconut Islands drifted by one by one till we arrived at Point Spigot of the Dashing Waterfalls. It has a strange name, but what a wonderful place: nice people, great food, and hundreds of little waterfalls all over the island. It was also home of the Fleetfoot Bottle Races. The idea is to drop your hand-painted, corked bottle into the water at the top of Point Spigot, right where the water comes out from under the big rock. Then you run, jump, swing from trees... anything you have to do to follow your bottle to the finish line at the entrance to Boonsburg Bay. Since all the water flows there eventually, you know where the bottles will wind up, but how they get there is another story altogether.

The water forks and turns and twists and forks again, and you have to follow the exact path your bottle takes or be disqualified. You race in teams of five, and whichever team gets four bottles to Boonsburg Bay first wins. That's because there's always a chance one bottle will take the fork that leads to Garfton's Gully, and once you're there it's pretty hopeless as far as getting anywhere very fast. So just in case, only four bottles are needed to win. The championships were really fun to watch. I sort of wound up rooting for the Green Team because of a little girl named Angelina. Her bottle took the fork to Dewdrop Ridge where she was too small to reach the big tree most of the boys grab and climb down. So what did she do? She jumped in the water and went over the falls right behind her bottle, laughing as she took the plunge. Everyone agreed it was the high point of the race, and it was especially fitting that the Green Team won. Then we cooked hot dogs over the fire, and told stories, and sang songs, and the sun was slowly setting. I climbed up to Point Spigot myself to see the beautiful clouds over the water in the west. That's when I had the idea to drop a stick in the water and see if I could follow it back to the bay. But it was getting kind of dark, and I had to give up when I couldn't see it anymore. Bye for now and I hope to see you Sunday morning.

Your friend in Garfton's Gully, Steve.

Addendum

Explanation: End-of-years can be busy, and if my records are correct, this report from Garfton's Gully was the last written part of the journey, but for those who've read this far I'll add that I did arrive back at Bubble Creek Quarry. The Peepeloes were there, but Old Jumbuggy was a little under the weather, so he hadn't made the trip. But I made the trip to his cabin and shared all the adventures, and he told me again of his travels in bygone times. The Links of Loquosset hadn't changed a bit, though there were a couple new recipes for cornbread butterpickens. Stop by if you're traveling past. Breakfasts are best.

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