

PETER CHARLAND
The P.J. Folk Singers

Summer 1995
Twenty Years Later

Dear P.J.er's,

I am writing to you since it is impossible for me to be with you as I had hoped. When I told [REDACTED] that I would be joining you, I had counted on being able to reschedule a commitment I had made months ago. I was not and sincerely apologize if I have disappointed you. Another time...

I thought it might catch everyone up to speed if I quoted some excerpts from a letter I had sent to [REDACTED] in early Spring.

[REDACTED]'s letter gave movement to a video frozen in time. Like you, I was deeply touched by the life of the P.J. Folk Singers. I have asked the Good Lord's blessings on each member of the group thousands of times over the years. I've also asked the Good Lord's forgiveness for the mistakes I made and the people I may have hurt in the parish, however unintentionally.

While it may not have shown as much as I thought it did, I cared for each and every one of you. Each brought a special gift to the folk group that no other person could bring. It was this combination of gifts that created the concert we felt as one body moving through the years of your youth.

[REDACTED] and I spent a lot of time on the phone (don't tell [REDACTED]) when planning today's celebration. Later, [REDACTED] joined a conversation. Most recently, [REDACTED] and I spoke for nearly an hour. The ladies filled me in on as much as they could remember. All in all, it sounds like the P.J. Folk Singers are still making their mark on the world. Good for you.

Some of you have had your share of heart aches. Others made wrong choices, but corrected them as you grew to love the gifts God had given you. All of you, fill me with pride at having had the privilege of being your leader for as long as we were together. The song Camelot comes to mind... "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for happy ever aftering, that's known as Camelot".

Before speaking with [REDACTED] at Christmas, I had never had the opportunity to talk about the reasons I left the parish to the P.J. Folk Singers. The reasons I left were many. Principal among them, I had begun to realize that I was no longer being effective as I had expected myself to be. I found myself becoming more and more self centered and self absorbed. As I look back on it now, I realize I had fallen prey to such miserable characteristics because of my own personal loneliness. I do not say this by way of excuse. I just know how excruciating the loneliness was and how painful it was to celebrate holidays, especially Christmas, alone. The truly scary part is knowing that I was beginning to hurt people despite my best intentions to never do that to anyone. For this I remain truly sorry.

Working 60 - 80 hours a week in the parish, I realized later, was my way of masking my pain. I could no longer do that. Two years before I left I had a conversation with the Lord. It was just after Christmas. I could no longer hide my feelings from myself as I had done so masterfully up until that point in time. While I appreciated the love and generosity of the parishoners, I can not explain how painful it was to open those gifts by myself, with no one to share the delight and meaning behind each gift.

After a rather heated debate with the Lord, He asked me for two more years. I agreed not knowing why, but knowing that I owed it to Him. When the two years were up, I realized that I had failed to meet His expectations of my becoming whole in the parish life. We then both agreed it was time for me to go. But, sneaky guy that He is, He took one last shot at it by offering me a very attractive parish as a change of scenery. I always told you He doesn't give up easily.

When I left the parish, we talked again (not that we didn't talk frequently in between; I'm just telling you about the more memorable conversations). We decided that I would become a healer and that I would continue to work for Him. To that end, I have remained immensely dedicated. He has paid me in blessings and paid me well.

I went to graduate school, again. I found no one who meant as much to me as the one girl in my life before college and seminary. I continued to make mistakes, but slowly healed thru His grace. I began to understand that our conversations were real and our commitment to each other genuine. At His prompting, I looked up my high school sweetheart. It was almost like sliding down the steepest of slides at a water park. Everything I had felt for this girl was in front of me once again. And for her too. As it happened, she was freeing herself of a situation she should never have started. We married.

Soon after, I was proud to adopt her three sons as my own. And then the fun really started. All of a sudden I was responsible for three handsome young boys, a beautiful bride and myself. Let me tell you I was as scared as a long tailed cat caught in a revolving door. His grace calmed me and He reassured me of our commitment to each other. He would not let me down or leave me stranded without resources. We were blessed with two girls and suffered the loss of one son. Six would have been great, but five became a full house. I am very proud of my children and can also tell you that I am a grandfather three times. Can you believe that - a grandfather? And, I am only 29!

Over the years, I have become a good father and often thought of how things might have been different if I had been an equally good Father in the parish. When I mention that to the Lord, He reminds me that we have been over that ground scores of times and that He has forgiven me my weaknesses and that He continues to watch over my P.J.ers. I won't tell you the actual words He uses for fear of scandalizing you, but let me assure you that He makes His point quite clear. Then He reminds me of our contract and kicks me in the butt to start moving forward again.

I spend my life healing in any way I can. Typically, I am cajoling if not fighting with school systems about teaching my patients all of whom have Attention Deficit Disorder or Learning Disabilities. I have earned a reputation that precedes me when I walk into a school for a meeting with teachers. I also treat adults with ADD helping them to heal from the hurt of so many years not knowing what was wrong with them, but having been convinced by others something was.

I am happy to know that so many of you keep contact with each other. There is one thing I would like to say. Many of you have left the Catholic church and sought other churches that would answer your needs. I am certain there must have been many internal struggles while you were in that process. The Church had a magnificent way of imparting guilt if we did not follow her guidelines to the letter. And we thought Jewish grandmothers had a corner on guilt.

The most important thing is that you have remained loyal to Christ no matter where you find Him. Please remember all the times we talked about how important His friendship is in each of our lives. Recall too, how much a part of our lives He wants to be. Don't be afraid to invite him to dinner or to play tennis. He would rather be asked than tag along uninvited.

As you grow even older, He will reveal more and more of His plan to you. Each will interpret their part in their plan in a different way. For my part, I advocate a missionary church without all the trappings and titles and funny looking hats some religions force their members to endure. Jesus was and is yet a simple man. He walks among us unnoticed, but ever looking for our smile or wink of welcome. If for any reason, you have lost intimate contact with Him, draw close to Him once again. Invite Him back into your life on a daily basis. Talk to Him when you pray as you would to your closest friend. Forget the memorized prayers we used to say to statues of clay or marble. Be you and let Him enjoy the you He had so much a part in creating.

Here's a secret. If you can be comfortable talking to Him when you are on the "throne", you've got it made. I don't mean to be crude, but I do mean to say that He is as uncomfortable with rote prayers as you would be if Queen Elizabeth offered you tea and crumpets at four o'clock.

Think about how he has been a part of your life. Release the failures. Let them go. When you have come to understand how He has never left your side, figure out a way of telling others. Let them know of this man Jesus and how terribly important he is to your well being.

I have a picture in my office (right above the chair I sit in during treatment) of the Laughing Jesus. I have never gone into the office to help heal another soul without that picture being there as a reminder to me that I never go into the office alone. And when people look at me while talking, they necessarily see Him. Let me tell you, the picture has had its effect time and time again. As well, when I get stuck (and the best of us do once in a while), I look at the picture of Jesus in my minds eye and say something to the effect of "Help, this is beyond me". Never, not once, has He not jumped in to bail me out. He is there each and every time. He is my compass and my ballast and

the wind beneath my wings as I carry people aloft from their pain and suffering.

Most recently, He entered my consciousness once again. This time with a bang you probably heard in Georgia or Florida and wondered what it was. He did what He calls a mid course correction. For two and a half days, He had me on the end of string, dangling. And then He looked at me and said "Peter, these are your choices: do it my way or watch the ____ hit the fan while you are down wind". I have chosen to do it His way.

You see, we never know where He is going to take us or what He will ask of us. All I know is that He has something He wants me to do. In this last instance, He was becoming impatient with how long it was taking me to get to where He wanted me to be. So He rattled my cage. On the up side, it's good to know that He is still around watching out for me.

He is there for you as well. Please, I beg you, don't shut Him out. Let him ease into your life like soap sliding into a bath of warm water. Let Him be as much a part of your life as possible. I promise you, you will only reap the benefits for this is one man who will never disappoint you.

When you return home, go off by yourself to a field, pick a small bouquet of wild flowers and spend a moment thanking the Good Lord for all He has given to you and for every opportunity He has created that has allowed you to express your love.

Please feel invited to write to me whenever you have the time or inclination. [REDACTED] has produced a directory of addresses. Mine is among them.

I long to be with you, but know that best is already there at your party. Thanks for making my life so rich as it was in Sts. Philip and James. You will never know how much it meant to me.

And remember, you are The Song Entitled You.

Love,
