

Dan and Louis

Written by Vivian Bikulege

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On a quiet Wednesday night in a New Jersey hotel room, I rediscovered Dan Fogelberg. My niece was texting me with YouTube videos of Troye Sivan “sipping waterfalls” in *Youth* and James Bay singing a directive that none of us needs to wear a *Best Fake Smile* and “you don’t have to care so don’t pretend,” when I harkened back to what I was listening to in my twenties and I thought of Dan and through the technological magic of Pandora and iTunes, I stepped back into his music and a past life.

A long time ago, I thought I would get married on the beach with enough cash or invitational influence to entice Fogelberg to sing *Longer* at the conclusion of the ceremony:

*I'll bring fire in the winters
You'll send showers in the springs
We'll fly through the falls and summers
With love on our wings*

*Through the years, as the fire starts to mellow
Burning lines in the book of our lives
Though the binding cracks and the pages start to yellow
I'll be in love with you
I'll be in love with you*

Such is the fairy dust of daydreams and by-gone fantasies, youthful romance and lost affections. Instead, I was married in The Holy Name of Jesus Catholic Church in New Orleans replete with stained glass framed in Gothic-style architecture, a military sword arch as the finale to an exchange of vows and a Rolls Royce limousine as a Cinderella chariot to the wedding reception. A kind of fairy tale but one dripping with the accoutrements of formality, expectation

and circumstance. It all broke down into an event that could compete with any Mardi Gras ball but Dan never made it and instead my father-daughter dance was *Proud Mary* and Mac and I swayed to “our song” –

Georgia –

as the ghost of Louis Armstrong crooned over the raucous din of imbibing guests.

This year, Mac and I will celebrate thirty years of marriage and every day, each month, and the sum of all of our minutes together and apart are a testimony to perseverance, forgiveness, and real, true love. And yet, even now, I do not believe I really know what love is.

Recently, I lost my Uncle Bud. Bud and my Aunt Ruth were married sixty-eight years. *Say what?*

Sixty-eight years – and most of the last ten were spent in the family room of a four-bedroom house in a Pittsburgh suburb. What did they talk about in the twilight hours and years of married couple conversation? Pills and medication, grown grandkids, home repairs, what’s for dinner again, Wheel of Fortune, Pirates baseball, politics? Does one still need to talk? Has it all been said? I will never know that longevity of married life. My weekly conversations with Mac are conducted via emails and end with “LU” and “LU2” – shorthand for quick virtual kisses.

There are still walks on the beach, the occasional dinner out but now there are dogs and my Mom, 401K’s and Roth IRA’s, leftovers and car payments, colonoscopies and gray hair, wrinkles and age spots, snoring and ear plugs.

So when Dan came strolling down memory lane, with lyrics from *Same Old Lang Syne*, it made me a bit sad to consider the passing of time and the morph of marriage. But I know better and I am amazed by the miracle of longevity in a relationship and I have to recognize it in the reality of two people growing old together. When I look into my husband’s eyes, really look into them, I see every hope, every promise still there between us. I see a reflection of myself and at the same time, the confusion of still figuring out who I am, who he is. I know one day his eyes will close or mine will shut first and it will be pain filled but until then, just the gift of those eyes and the wonder of the person behind them still keeps my heart beating.

There was no beach wedding but there was Communion. My feet weren’t sandy and bare but there were white silk stockings and a blue satin garter tossed to some unsuspecting bachelor and instead, there was Louis, Louis Armstrong and after thirty years, maybe what I need to remember is that:

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*Still in peaceful dreams I see
The road leads back to you.*

My wedding anniversary is in August and until then, I wish all of you who are in love, who have loved, who have yet to love and those whose love cannot be defined, a blissful saunter down a sun-filled memory lane and the romance of springtime and seasons yet to come.