

# NORTHWEST HERALD

## Penkava: Peter, Paul and Mary and me

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A bundle of ripened Baby Boomers went out last Saturday night and had a really groovy time. No, they didn't go out to dinner at IHOP. Nope, they weren't playing bingo. And uh-uh, it wasn't a field trip to Walgreens to check out the latest in raised toilet seats.

These children of the '60s flocked to the Raue Theater in Crystal Lake to spend an evening with 75-year-old Peter Yarrow, former member of the musical group Peter, Paul and Mary, the paradigm for the folk music movement of yesteryear. Today's youth would describe them as three dudes who sang with swag and were really poppin'. But to us oldsters, they were the conscience of our generation put to music.

Yep, those of us with high mileage were out in force. You could tell because the lines to the washrooms were long and our hair, what was left of it, was short. But there was no lack of fond memories, and somehow our minds would quickly and deftly recall the faded lyrics of songs gone by.

Sitting in our seats before the show, we commented about how plain the stage set was: just a couple of stools and microphones with a blank recessed curtain. A simple setting. Kind of like the music itself. And kind of like how we used to be as well.

Peter looked old as he walked out and gingerly sat himself down on the stool. When he started to sing, you could notice a bit of aged softness in his voice, but even so, what he sang about was as mighty as the day the music was notated and the lyrics were penned. Puff was still magic, the lemon tree was still pretty, and the kisses were still sweeter than wine.

But I noticed something different about Peter's message. In the olden days, he and Paul and Mary were urging us to hammer out justice and warning and love. But it appears we didn't listen. As teenagers we protested against injustice, but when we grew old enough and powerful enough to really change it, our generation just became a part of it. Now it was as if Peter was reminding us of what time and life had made us forget. That it was not too late to remember. Peace. Love. Brotherhood.

Peter, Paul and Mary sang their songs as anthems, not just as melodies. They asked us how many times can a man can turn his head, pretending he cannot see. They wondered how many ears must one man have before he can hear people cry. They questioned how many deaths will it take till we know too many people have died. And back then we listened and nodded our heads in wonderment and accord.

So there we were ... old, grey folkies sitting there being entertained by an old skinny, balding man with a guitar. We listened and sang and laughed and cried. And we once again nodded our heads in wonderment and accord. But there was a bittersweetness floating in the air. For

when we first heard those refrains, we were young and filled with the hope of change and new beginnings. Now the cobwebs of “If only” and “What if” clung heavily to the harmonies of those lyrics.

But Peter well knows the times they are a-changing. He now campaigns to reach the hearts of the children, the new generation, to teach them about the devastating effects of disrespect and intolerance and ridicule and bullying. And when the day is done, when the ship comes in, he hopes our children and grandchildren will not have to wonder where have all the flowers gone.

And just like that, Peter walked off the stage and was leaving on a jet plane, reminding us all that the answers, my friend, are still blowing in the wind.

- Michael Penkava is a retired teacher who taught for 35 years at West Elementary School in Crystal Lake. He had a chance to briefly interview Peter, but forgot his questions and just babbled on like a fanatical teenaged groupie. But he did get an interesting quote from Mr. Yarrow, who stated, “Thank you.” He can be reached at [mikepenkava@comcast.net](mailto:mikepenkava@comcast.net).

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