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HIGHER GROUND NEWSLETTER – May 2018

Welcome

Higher Ground Australia was formed in 2001, when a group of twelve strangers from Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria gathered in the Grampians region of rural Victoria to commemorate the fourth anniversary of John Denver's tragic death. By the end of the weekend, we had become firm friends and had arranged to meet the following year in New South Wales.

During that year, I was asked to not only organise the weekend, but to take on the role of leader of the group. Although I had accepted the role with trepidation, I quickly realised that we had started something really special. By the third gathering, we decided that we wanted to make our group more formal, so we held our first Annual General Meeting, which then resulted in the drawing up of a basic constitution. Higher Ground Australia was born. Because we are scattered across Australia (and now the globe), we have clung to three basic principles:

- To promote the music of John Denver
- To raise money to donate to raptor rehabilitation in Australia
- To plant a tree in John's honour annually

To this day, HGA still promotes the music of John Denver, still raises money to support raptor rehabilitation, and still plants a native tree to honour the life and music of John Denver. Times have changed, people have come and gone, but our basic principles have remained firmly the same.

Our office-bearers (including me) are democratically decided-upon at each AGM, when we meet somewhere in Australia on a weekend that coincides with that of Aspen in October. We rely on the generosity of people who give their time, their money, their bargaining skills to make these weekends the success they are. Not one person can do this alone, and year after year I see those who go over and beyond expectations to pull off another miracle just to get things done. Sometimes I forget to thank them. These people who go in 'to bat for us' each year, find suitable accommodation, organise the purchase of food, organise music, provide trees, plaques, picture books for donations, and sell raffle tickets to raise the money we give to raptor rehabilitation. I consider myself to be very lucky. If it wasn't for HGA, I wouldn't have met some of the most wonderful people in the world whom I consider my good friends.

HGA has introduced me to a whole new world of tribute artists. It has given me an insight into the amount of work involved in putting a show together; in getting bums on seats. I have huge respect for tribute artists who work so hard with their craft to share their talents with an audience, and I appreciate the work they do to keep John Denver's music alive. I also acknowledge that these people are not just JD tribute artists. They are talented musicians in their own right. They are gifted singer/songwriters, and they do what they do for the love of the music. It's a hard slog.

I LOVE THEM ALL.

HGA has also opened many doors of opportunity for me personally, and those have been taken up with gratitude. If it wasn't for HGA, I probably wouldn't have done the road trips through the western states of USA, or to Alaska. I probably wouldn't have hooned around Colorado with my good friend, Pat (and I'm saving for the next adventure). I wouldn't have listened to people's unique and personal stories about how John's music has affected them. My life has been enhanced in so many wonderful ways by my association with HGA and the reason we are in existence – John Denver.

Last year, before, during and after Aspen in October, I was appalled when I read some hideous comments made about some tribute artists, many of which were made by people I know or those who, like me, represent the various JD groups around the world. In fact, I began to question my own role with HGA and whether it was relevant twenty years after the passing of John. Everything we had done to promote the music of John Denver and the tribute artists who make his music accessible seemed to be in vain. I considered walking away from HGA and the seventeen years I had invested into it. Suddenly the 'vision of peace' that John talked about at his concerts, in his songs, and in his writings seemed to disappear. And this was the 20th anniversary tribute!

However, just last month, I read a Facebook post from a person I would not have otherwise met if not for HGA. Rory Young, a talented photographer and writer shared his thoughts about John's music and how it affected him personally. He touched on experiences we have all felt at one time or another, but more importantly, he emphasised the value of listening to others singing John's songs. His lengthy but perceptive post is below. This has been reproduced with Rory's permission.

From Rory Young

As posted in April, 2018 on the John Denver Music and Communication Facebook page.

I felt it best to begin a new post thread relating to an earlier post that I read on this group. The original author of the post had mentioned how difficult it was to hear recordings of others who sing John's songs. So, I wanted to simply post my own thoughts and feelings, regarding this idea. I'll try to keep this brief, but, you know me, 😊 Okay... this isn't brief.

But, I pray that it speaks to your spirit.

I was raised listening to John Denver, as I'm sure most all of us were. Which means, if you were in the days of the 60's, 70's and 80's before MP3's and your own Internet channel preferences, that if you wanted to hear John sing several songs, you'd often hear the same album of his repeat, over and over. You'd pop in an 8-track, you might throw a cassette in to the car tape player, or hear the same side of an LP album over and over, while you worked.

As a country kid growing up in the Hill Country of South Texas, I'd work on our family property in the hot summer days. Quite often, I'd work on our fence, digging a post hole with a post hole digger, often into the Texas limestone.... my dad thought that this was a great job for a young man, so I'd try to get two holes into solid limestone done in the morning cool, before the sun got too hot. Working with solid limestone was tough, but it was bearable w/ John's voice singing from the 8-track. And I'd learn the sequence of the songs, then the nuances of his voice to the particular song, and then think on the meanings on the songs at hand, and even sing along at times. When most of us say that we quite literally cut the vinyl through with the record needle, or we stretched the cassette tape from playing too much, we really quite literally did... and we were poor, so we'd live with it... we'd live with a stretched portion of the cassette tape, hearing John go low a little bit when he should have gone high on the vocals, or hearing a scratch in the record.

I remember that my personal copy of Seasons of the Heart had a scratch through "Islands". I literally thought there was a bass drum beat every so often through one part of the song! It wasn't until I heard it years later, on another recording, that I realized that my copy had been scratched. And, back then, if you were lucky enough to have a John Denver album to listen to, then you were also one who generally went crazy with happiness anytime that you heard the local radio station play one of John's songs. That was a special day...

😊 And, you'd go crazy, and sing along, often with the car windows down, and you at the top of your lungs.

You got to know John's songs... the nuances, the repetition, the versions... and anything different was obvious... was noticeable. It was... different. And then, through the years came different things and change ups with John. We'd get excited when he'd do a television special. Heck, in those days, when we were too cheap to have actual VCRs, we'd even grab the tape recorder and record John on the TV... with the recorder right next to the TV. It made for terrible playback, but we didn't care. It was John, and it was awesome.

We loved John's special voice. It was, and still is, magical.

He was special. He was one in a million, one in a billion.

And, he will always be.

But, there's a B-Side to the story. And, it's not a "supplemental" part, but in actuality, it's a continuance of the story.

And, for many, it's tough to see.

But, it's real. And, it's good to see.

Because, John was, after all, human. And, humans are perishable. Humans don't live forever in their mortal bodies. So, it was a matter of time before the golden voice that he was blessed with would be silenced.

For John, unfortunately, that time was much sooner than anyone anticipated.

He could have left us with one album. He could have left us with ten. No matter what the number or originality, every loving fan would listen to them all, and every devoted, loving fan would come to a finite point where they had heard and mostly memorized all known recordings of his. It's simply inevitable. And it's not a bad thing. It's fun, it's healthy to a point, and it brings good memories of times.

But, the one thing that we all know, is that John was NOT simply the sum of his voice, not just the total of his vocals, and he was not limited to the songs that he sang.

John Denver was more. He dreamt about more, did more, and urged people to do more than he even could. So, the one takeaway was that John shared, through his music, song and speech, the fact that the world was in a difficult situation, and that it was going to take a whole lot of people to get going on the solution.

And, we have to remember that. We have to remember that he touched the hearts of many, many people. Old, young, good singers, talented people, and people who sing like me... lol.

And, people do become motivated, and they do come back to community places such as this.

They want to give back; they want to share. They want to show that this one guy "spoke to them".

And they want to do it in the medium that they have been blessed with.

For some, it's through song and music.



For me, it happens to be through word and photography.

But, for all of us, whatever it is, it's through love and peace.

And that positive thing, that "giving" of ourselves back to the whole. Now, that's something that cannot be denied. It can't be detracted from. It's the very soul of what he spoke of. Of what he urged.

I remember once, when a JD event was planned, for Austin, Texas, I believe. And we went. And the curtain rose, and the singers sang. It was shortly after John's passing, and the memories were still there, of course.

And, the singers launched into "Rocky Mountain High". But, the arrangement was nowhere near the original.... in fact, it seemed quite the opposite. It was full of rock, and funk, and soul. And, you could feel the icy stares and needles in the crowd. I think that was the first time since John's death that I had heard someone.. anyone... sing one of his songs DIFFERENTLY than he had done the song.

And, immediately, my first defense was one of indignation... I was initially mortified. And, pissed off.

In my head, thoughts raced, like: I had known John. We had had a meeting planned the week he had died. Couldn't they plainly see how badly they were tarnishing his name?

And, from the looks of some of the people around me, I could see that I was not alone in my thoughts.

But, slowly, tenderly, as the songs went on, many of us began to see... what John had tried so hard for us to see:

That we are all one, in the spirit of the song. That the music is the same, though the singer is different. That it's all of us or none. We're all in this, together.

We... Are... The... Family... Of... Man...

We, are the family.

And my eyes were opened. I cried. I clapped. I hollered.

And, yep. Some around me didn't "get it"... and they looked at me as if I were some demonic, crazed person, who clearly had turned his back on John Denver and all that he had stood for.

When, in actuality, I had done just the opposite... I realized what he meant. That each of us is special.

Since then, my view has not changed. True, John's voice was golden, and it was amazing. I don't necessarily think that someone else can work hard and take on John's songs to a point where I'll either forget John or think they outdid him. That's just ain't gonna happen.

But, I have matured to the point where I get where they're coming from. I realize that they're trying to

give back in the way that they can internalize it and send it back out.

And for that, I praise them, because they're doing what John urged them to do. And that can never be taken away.

Thanks for reading this far. Peace, my friends.

-Rory,

Happy (belated) Mother's Day

Although this was written by John to his mother for her birthday in 1997, I think it is a fitting tribute to all mothers for Mother's Day.

"My dear mother,

I have wanted to tell you today how very much I love you. I wanted you to know how much you are respected and appreciated by me. That I know how big your heart is, how much you feel and how much you care.

There are times that I wish I could take you in my arms and hold you in a way that would make you feel loved and cared for - that you would feel safe and warm and really appreciated for the wonderful woman you are.

That you would feel understood and respected for all the things that you do. That you would know that someone else knows how much love you have given of yourself beyond measure - time and time again - not only to Dad and Ralph and Ron and me, but also to our families and to so many others.

I wanted you to know what a blessing you have been in my life, and through me to so many others. I would not be the man that I am, nor would I be able to sing the way that I do, nor would I have written the songs that I've written without the influence and the inspiration that you have been to me.

I want you to know that today there are hundreds, if not thousands, of people who join me in saying: 'God bless the day that you were born.'

Happy Birthday, Mom - and many more. I love you.

Your son, John"

Our Deepest Condolences

On behalf of us all at HGA, I would like to extend our sincere condolences to Genie Boyd, whose mother died on Friday, 11th May. Genie's mum had a colourful life, and lived it to the full during her 92 years on this earth. As an expert animal trainer, she found herself in the California desert town of Pioneertown working for the Gene Autry film organisation, as well as performing on the rodeo circuit for many years.

Whilst Genie is currently living in USA, she hopes to return to Australia in the near future. Back in 2006, Genie generously designed and donated printed recipe books to Higher Ground Australia, which were able to be sold for 100% profit. The donation that year was presented to the now-retired Alf and Liz Boden for their Australian Animal and Raptor care facility in Brisbane.



2018 JD Tribute Weekend

We have finalised the basic arrangements for our 2018 John Denver Tribute Weekend, which will be held on the weekend of 12-14 October. Due to most of our members taking overseas holidays this year, and thus unable to put a lot of time into the organising of the weekend, we have decided to revisit the *Hunter Valley Hotel Academy, McLeod Road, Kurri Kurri NSW*. We have booked two cottages for the weekend, and the total costs will be posted once we have an idea of final numbers. As usual, we try to keep our costs to the minimum, and I don't think the accommodation for two nights would exceed \$100 per person for the weekend.

A non-refundable deposit of \$40 per person may be paid at any time to me by direct deposit to: Westpac Bank

Branch #: 733-039

Account #: 542649

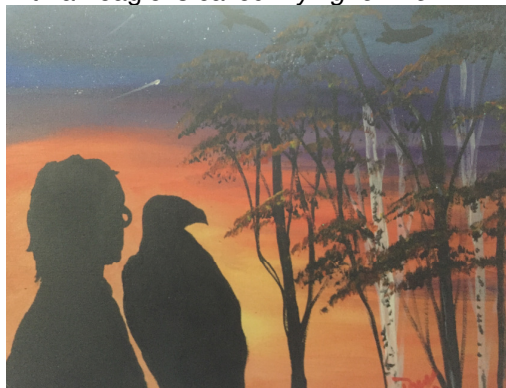
Name: Mrs Janette Frawley

Please put your name and JD in the description so I know who has sent the money through. Big thanks to Carmel and Alistair for booking the venue. We have had to make some adjustments to the usual Saturday night BBQ – more on that later.

2018 Fundraiser

Last year, we raffled a handmade quilt, but since I will be travelling on and off for the next three months, I won't be able to donate a quilt for this year's raffle.

However, Davy Turner of Wales has donated a beautiful painting, which he has done especially for the 2018 HGA raffle. The silhouette of John with an eagle is called *Flying for Me*.



We thank Davy for his generous gesture. All proceeds from the raffle and other donations are passed directly to Peggy McDonald of *Higher Ground Raptors*.

Her award-winning work with rehabilitation methods used mostly in the Middle-East has won her a Churchill Fellowship, which she is pursuing this year. We look forward to hearing about her work when she returns later this year.

In the meantime, please think about ways in which we can raise as much money as possible to facilitate her work. Donations are also very much

appreciated. All donations will be acknowledged and added to the fundraiser total. A copy of Mark Cormican's *Christmas is Calling* CD is included as a raffle prize.

If anyone has any items they would like to donate to add to a Mystery Box (or raffle prize), please let me know.

Higher Ground Australia Website

Our web address is <https://www.hgavic.com/>.

Despite my earlier promise of updating the website, I haven't had a chance to do so. It is on my list of priorities and I'll get it done as quickly as I can. Please pop in from time to time. Feedback on the site is always welcome. Please contact me on hga.vic@gmail.com with your comments.

Book Donation

A set of four books produced by Dawn Publications, featuring the illustrations of Chris Canyon and Janeen Mason will be donated to Luurpana Catholic School in Balgo, WA. The pupils of this remote school in the Kimberley are all indigenous, and whilst the main language of the region is Kukatja, the song lyrics and the wonderful illustrations of the books will be a nice addition to their library. We are also donating some John Denver CDs to the school.

Down Memory Lane 2

Jimmy Fong has announced his new show, which will be performed in Malaysia in June. The first concert on the 2nd June will be performed in his home town of Penang, and the second one on the 9th June will be held in Kuala Lumpur. For more information and for tickets, please check out Jimmy's website, www.jimmyfong.net.

Down Memory Lane is be a culmination of the songs that Jimmy learnt from listening to the Royal Australian Air Force base in Butterworth, near Penang and his original ones, like the recently released *Memories of Penang*. You can listen to this wonderful song through his website, <https://www.jimmyfong.net/music> Jimmy will literally take you on a nostalgic trip through your favourite songs and introduce you to new ones at the same time.



Jimmy is planning on a concert (or two) here in Melbourne in September/October. More

information on that will be posted later as details come to hand. We'd love to see you there.

Mark Cormican – Just announced!

Mark Cormican will be opening for wonderful Michael Martin Murphey at the **I-BAR Ranch in Gunnison Colorado on Friday, July 20, 2018.** Tickets are available from

<https://www.songkick.com/concerts/33417804-michael-martin-murphey-at-i-bar-ranch>

For anyone interested in listening to the talented Mark Cormican and Starwood, they have released their new CD, *Family Tree*.

CDs are available for \$15 (plus \$3 for shipping) to: Mark Cormican, P.O. Box 270178, Louisville, CO 80027 or go to PayPal "Friends and Family" and send \$18 to Sharon's email -

alaskanchild17@gmail.com

Mark has organised a Christmas concert at the Colorado Center for Musical Arts in Lafayette CO on **Saturday December 8th at 7:00 p.m.** Put it in your diary and more details to come later.

Kindred Spirit

Our good friend, Alan Cherry and his partner, Christine Carlin have joined forces musically, forming a duo called *Kindred Spirit*. Alan wrote a tribute song for John Denver of the same name in 1997, which was released in Aspen on a tribute song album.

A couple of months ago, I was invited to a private party at the Puffing Billy Packing Shed where Alan and Christine were performing. The acoustics of the timber venue were great, and it was a wonderful afternoon.

A *Puffing Billy Dinner Train* has been booked for December 1, 2018. This will include a roundtrip by Puffing Billy to the Packing Shed, where the audience will enjoy a dinner and be entertained by *Kindred Spirit*. It promises to be a wonderful evening of listening to the music John Denver and Patsy Cline, whilst enjoying dinner. I would like to organise a HGA table for this event, so please let me know in advance if you are interested. I will have some firm costings for the event very soon. This would be a wonderful early Christmas gift for the Denver/Cline fans out there. For additional information, please contact me

hga.vic@gmail.com.



'Timeless' a heartfelt journey of music

Debbie White April 6, 2018 – Vallarta Daily



Returning to Act II's Red Room for a 4th year, the musical duo Renee Armand and Paul Aleman bring their new show "Timeless" to appreciative audiences for 4 more performances, April 7, 10, 12 and 14. In their new show, these phenomenal musicians deliver some of our favorite songs from their past shows, 'Rocky Mountain High' and 'Laurel Canyon' along with new, inspiring music.

Renee, a John Denver band member at the height of the music's popularity, is an extraordinary singer who captivates her audience with each and every heartfelt song. Paul's easygoing stage presence and superb guitar accompaniment and vocals are a perfect match for Renee's exquisite vocals. They are joined by Renee's brother, Rick Armand, who is also a gifted musician.

The show opened with a spirited, fun version of the John Denver favorite, "Country Roads." With the fabulous vocals, harmonies and guitar accompaniment, we knew the evening was going to be great! Next, we thrilled to The Mamas and the Papas signature tune, "California Dreamin'" and heard a wonderful background story about Renee's connection to Mama Cass.

The very timely, Steven Stills song, "For What It's Worth," reminded us, "We'd better stop, hey what's that sound. Everybody look what's going down." Sung with such incredible passion and feeling, Renee also spoke words of appreciation for the young people around the world who are standing up for truth and justice.

Paul treated the audience to a stunning version of John Denver's "Annie's Song." His voice and guitar played beautiful tribute to this beloved song. Several years back, the 'real' Annie was even in the audience one night for Paul and Renee's performance.

Renee sang the James Taylor favorite, "Fire and Rain," with such emotion and passion! And Paul's exceptional version of the Gordon Lightfoot classic, "If You Could Read My Mind" was followed by Rick Armand joyfully singing Van Morrison's, "Brown Eyed Girl."

One of my personal favorites, was "Fly Away" which featured fantastic harmonies by Renee. I heard her sing this song with John Denver back in the mid 70's and she still performs it flawlessly. Her talent, seasoned with her vast musical experiences, touches us all so profoundly!

Paul's rich, gentle voice was incredible on the Glen Campbell number, "Wichita Lineman." And we were led to a natural high by the trio's awe-inspiring version of "Rocky Mountain High." Renee sang the deeply moving love song, "Morning Prayer," which completely captured our hearts. And we were moved to tears with her original song, "I Want to Go to Mexico." We were inspired by Rick Armand's thought provoking song, "How Hard It Can Be." Another magnificent moment in the show, was the brilliant performance of John Denver's "My Calypso" sung by the trio that honors the work of Jacques Cousteau.

As we neared the end of the show, Renee dedicated, "The Boy from the Country," to her beloved friend, John Denver, who she will always love and miss. And the final song of the night was a gorgeous version of the Eagles' favorite, "The 7 Bridges Road."

The audience was encouraged to join in on songs and there were smiles on people's faces throughout the night as they enjoyed the music. I don't think that you could have found more 'authentic,' 'in the moment' people than those 3 musicians on that stage. The intimacy of The Red Room only heightened the personal connection that we felt.

When you combine first-class musical talent, authenticity and superb music from the 60's and 70's, you end up with a priceless musical experience. I hope that you'll see the show and discover the magic that happens when Renee, Paul and Rick share their music and their hearts. <https://www.vallartadaily.com/a-review-timeless-a-heartfelt-journey-of-music/>

Back Home Again

A tribute to John Denver.

"In this time of environmental concerns, and Americans' efforts to simplify their lives, it seems that John Denver's music and message are even more relevant today, yet you rarely hear his music on the radio anymore."

Tom Becker is a former member of the Legendary Folk Group, The New Christy Minstrels, and has gone on to appear with Grammy Winners and Music Legends including Ray Charles, Jerry Lee Lewis, Willie Nelson, Gregg Allman and Jerry Jeff Walker.

Check out Tom's website for his forthcoming show schedule.

<http://www.johndenvertribute.net/schedule.htm>

Tom's next tribute show will be on July 22-23 in Lancaster PA. Click the link for details and tickets.

<https://dutchapple.com/>

Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon

Chris Collins and Boulder Canyon are excited to be returning to the beautiful Wheeler Opera

House to pay tribute to John Denver's music and legacy. More details will be coming!

The concert is scheduled for 13th October. More details later.

Buy your very own Wheeler Opera House seat!

New seats are being installed at the Wheeler Opera House, and the old ones are being sold. Don't miss your chance to own a part of Wheeler history - proceeds go to support the 2019 Wheeler Arts Grants program fund. Quantities are limited through this website.

<https://www.publicsurplus.com/sms/aspencity.co/list/current?orgid=89823>

Aspen in October 2018

Aspen in October is off to a slow start, compared to last year's lineup, but there is still plenty of time for tribute artists to lock in their gigs for the week. For more information on the current list of concerts, please click on this link.

<http://johndenver.de/index.php/en/aspen-in-october/aspen-2018>

Hopefully the new seats will be installed in the Wheeler Opera House before Chris Collins' concert on October 13!

From the Archives

Remembering John Denver with Anna Zapp

Sewing News October 12, 2018

A chat with his custom sewist, Anna Zapp



Today marks 20 years since the passing of John Denver, who was tragically killed in a plane crash off the coast of California on Oct 12, 1997. We celebrate the life of the humanitarian, political activist, award-winning songwriter and performer by paying tribute to his personal sewist and costumer, who sewed his extravagant stage shirts for 10 years. Anna Zapp, a former Sew News contributor, shares what it was like to work with John Denver and how he changed her life, taking her sewing business to the next level and helping her become a sewist for the stars.

SN: How old were you when you learned to sew?

AZ: The first time my hands touched a sewing machine I was about 7. Most Sunday afternoons we went to spend the afternoon with my



grandmother. I was kind of bored and there sat this sewing machine calling my name and there were plenty of scraps!

I played with her sewing machine every Sunday possible. When I turned 12, she gave me a new White sewing machine for my birthday. It was a beautiful aqua color. Everybody thought she was crazy except me! I had a life-sized three-year-old doll that I got for Christmas, so I made her some clothes for practice.

After making a couple of garments for my doll, I realized I wasn't much bigger than her so she went in the corner, and I started sewing for myself. By the time I got to 7th grade, a classmate liked what I made and commissioned me to make three denim shifts (in different colors). I charged her \$3.00 each, which included fabric.

I was mostly self-taught until I was able to take home-economics classes in high school. All I wanted to do was to sew. College taught me tailoring, pattern making and draping.

SN: When did you start sewing western shirts?

AZ: My ex-husband, Rennie, and I came to Colorado in the fall of 1971. Everyone told us there were no jobs. We were hippies but I put on my "straight" clothes and headed down to the fabric store and got a job. The person who hired me said I was over-qualified, but I didn't care! One day this woman came in and said she had a store that made custom western shirts. I asked her if I could work there and she said, "Can you sew?" She told me to come to the shop and make a shirt to see if I could meet her standard. Well, I thought I could sew until I met Rosie Cabas. Boy, was I wrong. The shop sewed at a level of perfection the like I'd never seen. My first shirt took me 18 hours and the pay was \$8! When my husband picked me up and he realized how long it took, he said "That won't do." I said, "Don't worry, the next one will go faster!" It did and I advanced to be able to make three shirts a day minus snaps—but still too much work for one day. I quit working at the shop and we started doing craft fairs. We'd work all week: I was sewing western shirts and Rennie was doing woodwork. We'd head to a show on the weekends. I told Rosie I'd not sell the shirts in Boulder, as I felt that was her territory.

SN: How did John Denver discover your creations?

AZ: One of these arts and craft fairs was in a large field in Aspen. We all had to build our own booths, from the ground up, which was crazy but we did it. On the last day of the fair I spotted [Denver] across the field checking out each booth. He finally made his way to our booth and walked in, stood and looked at the picked over shirts that were left and turned around and said "Who makes these shirts?" I held up my hand and said, "I do." He shook my hand and said "Hi, I'm John." He

said he didn't care for any of the pieces he saw but made plans to come to our house and order some shirts the next week.

SN: How long did it take for other celebrities to start commissioning orders?

AZ: Not long. About a month later, John called to tell me he needed more shirts, and by the way, "Bob Redford" wanted some shirts like his. "I'll call him now and give him your number," he said. It was barely 15 minutes and the phone rang, and it was Bob calling to see if I could meet him at the Vail Environmental Symposium, where he would be speaking. We met him in his hotel room and I took his measurements. I made items for him and his wife at the time, Lola, for a number of years. Really fun!

SN: What's the most extravagant outfit you ever made him?

AZ: The most extravagant outfit was a black wool tuxedo with appliqué pieces on the shawl collar embellished with black diamond rhinestones. He had a hard time making up his mind about what he wanted, and when he did, I only had 10 days to make it.

I called friends to come over and help me cut out the appliqué pieces. It took all 10 days and until 9pm each night. It was easily over 100 hours. It had a vest, jacket and pants. The jacket lapels were totally embellished, the sides of the jacket were embellished, four inches wide, as well as the pant sides. Lots of work!

I started out making regular western shirts, denim bodies and print yokes, and visa versa, like the one he wore on his first Johnny Carson appearance. Some of the shirts were made of used jeans. After I made a dozen of that style, I thought I'd make him some two-color denim pants. He loved them!

On our second meeting, in Stapleton Airport, he asked for something special to wear to the Country Music Awards. Right on the spot, I saw in my mind's eye a tux with tails, made from medium-blue worn denim. He said "no tails" and I told him he needed tails. We made tails. It was lined in blue satin with lapels made from lighter blue brocade with sparkling slubs running through the weave. I had silver buttons custom made for the satin shirt and silver nickel buttons made for the tux.

This [arrangement] was fine until I made his first appliqué satin shirt. That was the start of a new look for him. The shirts had designs of flowers, leaves and stems with rhinestones accenting the center flower. He then wanted "appliqué outfits." I think I made 17 of them, decorated with individually cut satin pieces that created the particular design. All of these outfits were totally different.



SN: Can you describe the process of creating one of his shirts? Was it a collaborative effort or did he trust you to design everything from start to finish?

AZ: The short answer is yes, he trusted me! It was an artist's heaven! At first I would meet with him and show him samples of fabric for yokes only, to go on denim, and he'd pick all the swatches. After that, his secretary would call and tell me he wanted more shirts. As for the shirt and decorated pants outfits, on rare occasion he'd ask for a specific type of design, like an Indian motif.

SN: Were any of his songs particularly influential to you?

AZ: Yes! Rennie and I had moved back east and it was a cold, dreary day. We were both hard at work and "Rocky Mountain High" came on the little transistor radio; it was the first we'd heard it. We both sat down in the floor, I started crying and said, "We have to go back to Colorado!" The following summer we met John and the story began.

SN: What's your favorite "John Denver moment?"

AZ: Of course, the first moment was meeting him in the summer of 1973. One other moment was when we were in Los Angeles. He flew us out, first class, so I could hear him say on stage, "My mom didn't make this shirt, it's an Anna Zapp original, man!" And he had me stand up. Far out!

Another is when his movie Oh, God! premiered. He called to ask if I wanted to come to Aspen for the premiere, and he'd come get me in his Cessna four-seater. The Chinook winds were blowing, and we had a rough ride but arrived safe and sound. The movie was fun. The next day the winds were quite a bit stronger, and the Cessna was being thrown up and down and side-to-side. We tightened our seat belts and hung on for dear life. He said if anyone got sick in his airplane, no more rides for you!

SN: What did your relationship with John Denver mean to you?

AZ: It changed my life! My dream as a young teenager was to sew and design for famous people. Knowing John opened all kinds of doors. He wanted me to outfit his entire band, and I met and designed for Annie, his wife. He wanted everyone he met, like Robert Redford, [to own my shirts]. Redford then ordered a shirt for Willie Nelson. Many celebrities in the western music arena started wanting specialty shirts.

Paramount Pictures contacted me and wanted a special shirt for John Travolta to wear in Urban Cowboy, and some shirts from my line that they found at a store in Beverly Hills, Calif.

Needless to say, sewing for John Denver was a dream come true.

Anna Zapp is the author of The Zapp Method of Couture Sewing, published by Krause/F+W Media and available digitally at shopsewitall.com.

<http://www.sewnews.com/blogs/sewing/2017/10/12/remembering-john-denver-with-anna-zapp/#.WtT4tnqPynA.facebook>

The term 'sewist' is a new one for me. As much as I was tempted to do a search and destroy, replacing it with 'seamstress', I resisted.



This month, I've selected the lyrics of Graeme Connors' hit song, *A Little Further North*. We're flying to Broome, Western Australia at the end of this month. After attending the wedding of a friend, we are taking a road trip through the Kimberley to Darwin. Photos will be regularly posted on Facebook, and hopefully I will be able to update my current travel blog as I go.

<https://jefrawley.wixsite.com/justgo>



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A Little Further North

(Graeme Conners)

*The sun sinks behind me in the west
This is the time of day I love best
Salt breezes murmur through the coconut palm
As the colors change, they set a scene of tropic calm*

*Seagulls headed back to land
Over the mangrove and the salt pan
By a lazy creek with a six pack and a fishin' line
Win back some memories and losin' track of time*

*I head a little further north each year
Leave the cities behind; out of sight, out of mind
Up where my troubles can all disappear
I head a little further north each year*

*Feeling the night wrap around me
Eases my mind's serenity
Ocean waves are hummin' on the outer reef
These balmy days and sultry nights are a welcome relief*

*I head a little further north each year
Leave the cities behind; out of sight, out of mind
Up where my troubles can all disappear
I head a little further north each year
I head a little further north each year*