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# HIGHER GROUND NEWSLETTER – March 2018

## Welcome

Welcome and my apologies for the lateness of this, our first newsletter for 2018. Time passes very quickly, especially when a new grandchild is involved. I confess I spend a lot of time playing with our little grandson, and delight in the changes in him that occur on a daily basis.

We spent January in Peru, and enjoyed our tour very much. It was very challenging, with barely a spare minute to catch breath. Believe you me, I spent most of my time trying to catch my breath due to the high altitude. I thought that the walks around Ashcroft, Maroon Bells, and Aspen last October would have prepared me just a little for the altitude in Peru. Not so! If you are interested in reading about our time in Peru, the web address is <https://jefrawley.wixsite.com/justgo>

I've noticed that there are many new gigs already in the works from many John Denver tribute artists, so it is shaping up to be an exciting year.

## Vale Liz Seger

*It is with deep sadness that we announce the sudden death of our friend Elizabeth on Monday January 29th, 2018, in her 64th year. She was the daughter of the late Bunny and Owen Seger and sister to the late John Seger. She was predeceased by aunts, uncles and cousins throughout North America. She is survived by sister in law Gudrun Seger and nephew Matthew Seger. Throughout her lifetime Liz served on many committees, was an advocate for the disabled and loved the community where she was born and raised.*

*Liz was a graduate of local schools as well as Brock University (BA) and University of Western Ontario (BEd).*

Our dear friend, Liz passed away suddenly as she attended a medical appointment on January 29<sup>th</sup>. She was a good friend of mine and of Higher Ground Australia, and she will be missed very much. In 2012, I undertook an eight-day tour of New York, Niagara, Philadelphia, and Washington DC. Instead of taking the trip on the Maid of the Mist, I met Liz for breakfast. What a day! I so enjoyed spending time with her, and although we made plans to meet up again, sadly, it didn't happen. We kept in close contact via email, Facebook, and snail mail over the years. Liz was a teacher and taught for a number of years, but she had macular degeneration, which robbed her of her sight slowly over her lifetime. Her parents

and brother ensured that she learned all the skills she would need to live an independent life, and she did. She never drove a car or owned a mobile phone, but even without her sight, managed to travel extensively. Just a few years ago, she travelled alone to South Africa to attend the wedding of her goddaughter. We were all with her during that trip as she updated her Facebook page with the wonderful places she visited and experiences she had. Liz also had a number of health issues, which she managed. Her cat, Jazz, seemed to know when her blood sugars dipped, and would wake her up. She was, without a doubt one of the most remarkable people I knew.

Liz always loved the music of John Denver and I met her through one of the early John Denver newsgroups. Being a 'far-away' friend of Liz has enriched my life. It has given me an insight into the struggles faced by a person with a disability, but most importantly, it was an honour to know a person who faced each day, no matter how difficult it was, with joy.

I will miss her and her Facebook posts, as I am sure many of you will.

Liz, your last Facebook comment to me was Bon Voyage home, on the 26<sup>th</sup> January. I now wish you a 'bon voyage home' to join your parents and brother, and your cats. You will always be remembered.

## Higher Ground Australia Website

Our web address is <https://www.hgavic.com/>. I haven't had a chance to update the site yet, but am planning to spend some time on it this coming week. Please pop in from time to time. Feedback on the site is always welcome. Please contact me on [hga.vic@gmail.com](mailto:hga.vic@gmail.com) with your comments.

## 2018 JD Tribute Weekend

Our 2018 JD weekend has not yet been finalised. Due to many of us travelling this year, we have tentatively decided to book Kurri Kurri for a casual weekend. Peggy from *Higher Ground Raptors*, who is the recipient of our annual fundraiser will not be home this October, so we will arrange our JD tribute in the Southern Highlands next year. Carmel is going to follow up with the people at Kurri Kurri. If anyone would like to volunteer their services to help out with the weekend's organisation, please let me know.

[hga.vic@gmail.com](mailto:hga.vic@gmail.com)

## **Jim Connor to be inducted into the Bluegrass Hall of Fame**

Huck Treadwell Feb 28, 2018

Jim Connor will be inducted into the Alabama Bluegrass Music Association's Bluegrass Hall of Fame Saturday. Connor is best known for writing "Grandma's Feather Bed," a song made popular by John Denver.

Jim Connor will be inducted into the Alabama Bluegrass Music Association's Bluegrass Hall of Fame.

The induction ceremony will be Saturday at 4 p.m. at Spain Park High School in Hoover.

"I'm real proud," Connor said. "I play the old-time banjo. I don't play the straight Bluegrass picking style. I'm just real proud they selected me."

Connor grew up in Gadsden and often visited his grandmother's boarding house.

"Her boarding house was in Woodlawn," Connor said. "She loved music and would give musicians a discount on a room. There were a lot of times

I would go to the boarding house and she'd sing old songs and tell old stories. Sometimes there were musicians there and they'd play."

Connor learned to play the harmonica from his father and met Arthur Kuykendall at a fiddler's convention at Walnut Grove High School in 1961.

Connor said he was inspired by the way Kuykendall played the banjo and decided that was the instrument for him.

Connor attended Harvard and Birmingham Southern College, but music remained his passion. He was the banjo player for The Kingston Trio for five years and had some commercial success with his friend, Richard Lockmiller, and their duo R&J.

Connor said his parents weren't too fond of his career as a musician. But, he said they started to come around when he had a couple of gold records on the wall.

Connor and Lockmiller toured across the United States and played extensively in Europe and England. They even recorded an album while in England.

But, Connor said it got lonely on the road and he'd often write letters home. He wrote a letter to his grandmother and tucked a copy away in his banjo case. Years later, he found the letter when he was cleaning out his case.

He decided to turn it into a song. One day in 1968 he was practicing the song and an acquaintance of his, John Denver, walked in and said he wanted to record the song.

So Connor made him a recording on a cassette tape. As fate would have it, Denver lost the tape. Connor said he ran into Denver from time-to-time and was invited to Denver's house for a barbecue. Connor said he played the song for Denver's producer, Milton Okun and his song was recorded

on Denver's best-selling album, "Back Home Again."

"He loved 'Grandma's Feather Bed,'" Connor said. "He'd play it at all his shows and all his appearances."

Connor and Denver became friends and Okun produced Connor's album "Jim Connor."

Connor said when he was recording, Denver walked in and said he was there to sing backup vocals on the album.

After recording the album, Connor went on the road with Denver and continued to play banjo from time-to-time for Denver until his death.

"I had a lot of fun," Connor said. "Denver was a nice guy. He was one of the nicest people I ever worked with."



[http://www.sandmountainreporter.com/article\\_11398204-1cce-11e8-839f-7b1f910d762d.html](http://www.sandmountainreporter.com/article_11398204-1cce-11e8-839f-7b1f910d762d.html)

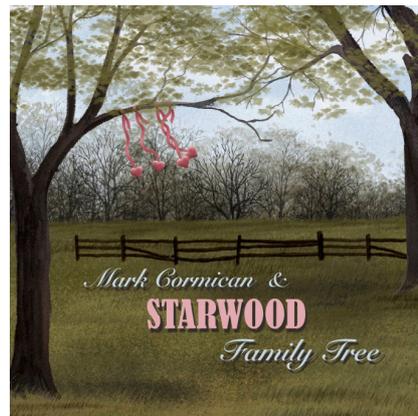
## **Mark Cormican and Starwood**

Mark Cormican and Starwood have released their new CD, *Family Tree*.

It consists of 12 original songs and the incredible musicians of Starwood (Ernie Martinez, Mark Johnson (the nice Mark Johnson), Johnny Neill, Jon Chandler and Robin JoLeady on harmonies) totally outdid themselves! There is folk, bluegrass, country, a little rock and roll and even a cowboy song. You will love this album!

To get one, just send \$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](mailto:alaskanchild17@gmail.com)



### **Roy Rivers Tribute to John Denver**

The **Rocky Mountain Foundation for the Performing Arts** presents Roy Rivers Tribute to John Denver on March 24 at Steamplant Events Centre, 220 W Sackett Ave, Salida, Colorado at 7pm. Click here for more information and tickets. <http://salidasteamplant.com/>

*The RMFPA is a non-profit organisation that raises money to award scholarships young people for instruments and to further their music education.*

### **Renee Armand & Paul Aleman in Puerto Vallarta**

Renee and Paul are performing in Puerto Vallarta on April 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 14 7:30pm



Tickets are available through

<http://actiientertainment.com/Timeless.php>

Singer/songwriter, Renee Armand and her partner, Paul Aleman, have teamed up to present the genius and joy of the music of John Denver, as well as more tidbits from Renee's life in the Laurel Canyon years!

Renee Armand was a member of John Denver's band and performed with him for six years. She is also the voice behind the Academy Award-winning song, "The Morning After," from the movie "The Poseidon Adventure!" Renee grew up in Laurel Canyon (the crossroads between Beverly Hills and Hollywood) at the same time as Carole King, Linda Ronstadt, Judy Collins, the Beatles, Mamma Cass, the Eagles, David Crosby and more... They lived... and loved... and wrote music... that has lasted a lifetime.

Paul Aleman is a singer, songwriter and guitarist who has been performing professionally since childhood. In college, he studied Musical Theater, and had his first musical produced in 1989. In 1997, he wrote the music and lyrics for "Freedom's Run," a fully-staged musical and 1997 Pulitzer Prize candidate. His musical, "Dillinger: Public Enemy Number One," was recorded by a full orchestra in Los Angeles, with several Tony-award winning actors (Alice Ripley, Debbie Gravitte, and Michael Maguire) leading the cast! Together, Renee and Paul have brought John Denver's music to literally thousands of

appreciative fans across the United States and here in Mexico. Performed brilliantly in songs and stories, Renee will share things about her life that she has never talked about...UNTIL NOW. Some of it will shock you, some will make you cry, some will make you laugh, but most of all, you'll be glad you came! For the past two years, their shows, Laurel Canyon and Rocky Mountain High, have been performed to sold-out audiences at Act II. Their show has a clarity and soulfulness that underlines their love of John Denver's music and draws audiences into singing along after the first few bars! We are thrilled that Renee and Paul are returning to Act II once again and can't wait to see their new show!

### **Back Home Again**

A tribute to John Denver

*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.*

*And, it all began with a Sears Silvertone guitar ....and the music of John Denver.*

*In recent years, Tom began to feel that John Denver's music and message were more important than ever.*

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

*So, he assembled a stellar band and created a concert that will inspire both long-time Denver fans, and those who may be less familiar with his music.*

*Timeless, universal themes of home, family, love and nature create the framework. Personal anecdotes and observations from his career in folk music create a warm, humorous and uplifting experience.*

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

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

Tom's next tribute show will be on May 18 in Irving Texas. Click the link for details and tickets.

<http://www.irvingartscenter.com/>

### **John Adams**

John Adams will be performing his 'Dutch Tour' from next week. Details are posted on his Facebook page,

[https://www.facebook.com/events/1451390464972509/?event\\_time\\_id=1451390564972499](https://www.facebook.com/events/1451390464972509/?event_time_id=1451390564972499)

### **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 13<sup>th</sup> October. More details later.

### **The Windows of Heaven**

Steve Gillette and Pat Pfister

This song by Steve Gillette (Darcy Farrow) is really beautiful. On hearing that I really liked this song, this is what Steve said.....

*It's very nice to hear that someone has connected with our song, and from Australia no less. I had this flash of insight that she heard the song at the exact opposite location to us here in Vermont, as if we could see through the earth. I'm probably mistaken about the geography, but it's very nice to hear. I am continuing to work on a better version of the video, and have wanted to get the song right before I put anything up on YouTube again, though I've left the earlier version there for now.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWJG6LB5y0E>

### **The Windows of Heaven**

*Every other day there's a story in the paper  
Some poor soul in a struggle with his neighbor  
Acting out in his righteous anger and the wrong is done.  
Now more than ever I find myself wishin'  
That I could be the fellow with the better ambition.  
And teach my children to look for the good in everyone.*

*If we could stand behind the windows of heaven  
And look deep into the heart of every man.  
Our children would fill this world with music  
And the lion lie down with the lamb*

*Before you know it you can build a wall around you.  
It makes you wonder how the good things ever found you.  
I would tear all the fences down if it was up to me.  
I know the mountain wont be standin' there forever.  
I know this life is no more certain than the weather.  
If all we have is this moment here together,  
That's enough for me.*

*If we could stand behind the windows of heaven  
And look deep into the heart of every man.  
Our children would fill this world with music  
And the lion lie down with the lamb*

*I know, there's a longing to be done with all the sorrow  
To climb up to where the dawn of Heaven rolls.  
But to know the better angels of our nature  
We must make the faithful journey of our souls.*

*If we could stand behind the windows of heaven  
And look deep into the heart of every man.  
Our children would fill this world with music  
And the lion lie down with the lamb.*

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### **The Backstory of the Woody Creek Tavern**

Tony Vagneur June 3 2017

The Woody Creek Tavern may have become a reliable barometer of when the summer season actually starts, at least according to many around the area. This past weekend at the Tavern was

clearly a warmup for the official Spandex Season, which, since the death of the Design Conference, is usually attributed to the Food & Wine Classic in Aspen.

The Tavern wasn't exactly over-crowded, but it wasn't exactly calm, either, and it looked like mostly a crowd of visitors from somewhere else.

There was the predictable line waiting to get an outside table under those great new umbrellas, but fortunately, our favorite corner table was still available inside. Predictably, the local luminaries maintained their usual seats at the bar.

This may come as a surprise to many, but the current Woody Creek Tavern isn't the first saloon to grace the Woody Creek Canyon. As early as 1885, Woody Creek was known as an up-and-coming mining town (take that, you agrarians), particularly attached to the Varney Tunnel (lead and zinc) in Lenado.

About this time, a stage stop was built near what is now the intersection of Upper River Road and Aspen Valley Downs Road, about a mile below the Tavern. Complete with stables, 10 or so hotel rooms and blacksmith shop, this was a happening place. The stage stopped, going both east and west, all day long. Most importantly, never was there built a stage stop without an accompanying saloon.

When the Denver and Rio Grande Railroad first rumbled up the valley in 1887, a siding and switching station was built at this stage stop, along with a section house for the railroad. The hotel and saloon across the tracks became a convenient stop for those needing a respite before the next leg of their journey. The stables became a stockyard for cattle, sheep and horses, to be shipped by rail.

The saloon was gone by 1906, and perhaps the Woody Creek Store had replaced the bar by then. My great-uncles, Jim and Louis Vagneur, bought the land and leased the buildings to various tenants over the years.

The Woody Creek Store and post office operated out of that location under several proprietors until 1958, when the operation was moved to the current location of the Tavern and Mobile Home Park. For you history buffs, the store was bought in 1922 by Ben Strawbridge, a retired Pitkin County sheriff and hoist operator at the Smuggler Mine. He sold it to Prue and Jess Bogue in 1938 who, like all the other owners, lived in an apartment behind the store. In 1953, the Bogues retired, selling the place to Lee and Virginia Vagneur Jones, who immediately got a 3.2-beer license to help lubricate trade.

In all honesty, the place was falling down, and by 1958, the Joneses packed it in and bought the land where the current Tavern and mobile home park stand from Jim Vagneur. His son-in-law, Jones, who had built our cow camp out of similar



logs, was a skilled craftsman and built the log structure that today houses the Woody Creek Tavern.

As you look at the Tavern from the road, the general store and post office were on the right side of the building; the middle section was a garage, and the connected building on the left (where the community center gathered) was the living quarters for the Jones family. Out back, behind the trailer park, they had a large corral that kept their ever-present horses, until some sick SOB poisoned them. That's another story, which came later.

I didn't know her in the following years, but there was a very tall, good-looking young girl who summered in Woody Creek. She lived across from Aspen Valley Ranch and every once in a while, she and her paint mare Kumana would get the urge to head to the Woody Creek Store to buy some Cracker Jacks. It was an exercise in futility, for as soon as the girl got the box opened, the Cracker Jacks began to rattle around and the horse would spook, bucking and taking off for home. The Cracker Jacks always ended up in the ditch.

In 1980, George Stranahan took control of the building and had the clever idea to put in a saloon, or tavern if you prefer, and the Woody Creek Tavern was born. It was a brilliant strategy, as many of us crusty, original customers can attest. Names like George and Patti Stranahan, Gaylord Guenin, Mary and Shep Harris, Dan Goldyn, Andy Arasz and others mark a long line of owners over the years.

Today your hosts are Laura Wren and Kevin Willson, who are doing a remarkable job of upholding the tradition of a very unusual bar and restaurant in a strange little roadside town, with its own post office.

<https://www.aspentimes.com/opinion/tony-vagneur-the-backstory-of-woody-creek-tavern/>

*We have all enjoyed a meal at the Woody Creek Tavern during our stays in Aspen. This little insight in how it came about is really interesting. It is certainly a lovely setting for an unusual, and very friendly pub.*

### **From the Archives**

#### **John Denver: Let this be a Voice**

Singing Nature's Song: Denver's Life and Work  
May 15, 2008

A song, it is said, can lift the heaviest heart and put a sparkle in the saddest eye. And, as John Denver showed during a remarkable life cut short by an untimely accident, a song can also be one of nature's best friends. NATURE presents an intimate portrait of the life and work of this popular singer-songwriter, who used his music and his prominence to work for the protection of some of Earth's most extraordinary wildlife and wild places.

*John Denver: Let This Be A Voice* takes viewers down country roads and up to high rocky mountains. Along the way, it offers a wealth of spectacular side trips, from the roaring rapids of the Colorado River and the serene lakes of back-country Alaska to a golden eagle's nest high on an Idaho cliff and a herd of wild mustangs on a Wyoming prairie.

The blond, bespectacled folk singer with the pleasing tenor voice first came to public attention in the 1960s as a member of the Chad Mitchell Trio. But while his guitar picking was popular, it was Denver's songwriting that vaulted him to fame. In 1967, his "Leaving On a Jet Plane" became an international hit for the folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary. Soon, he was singing his own hits, from the country anthem "Take Me Home, Country Roads," to his ode to Colorado's high country, "Rocky Mountain High."

As time passed, however, Denver sought to use his fame to promote protection of the places he knew and loved — and that had served as the inspiration for much of his music. "My greatest inspiration has always been the out-of-doors," he told fans during a 1995 chat on America Online. "The out-of-doors was my first and truest best friend. It was the desert in Arizona when I was in grade school. Later on, it was the woods around Montgomery, Alabama. Then, it was the plains or the wheat fields when I worked on wheat harvests. It was the forest and the lumber camp that I worked in when I was in college. Nature has always been my best friend. My songs are full of images from nature."

One of the first major conservation efforts to gain Denver's support was the 1970s campaign to preserve more than 100 million acres of wild public land in Alaska. Denver was a tireless spokesman for the effort, even making a television documentary that highlighted the dramatic scenery and abundant wildlife of America's final frontier. In 1980, he joined millions of other Americans in celebrating Congress's approval of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, which set up dozens of new national parks, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas. And he was one of the dignitaries invited to stand in the Oval Office of the White House while President Jimmy Carter signed the bill into law.

"I experienced one of the most fulfilling days of my life when I stood with President Carter... as [he] signed the Alaska Land Conservation Act into law," Denver wrote in 1995. "The voice of the American people found harmony with that of the President and the Congress. The chorus that was raised said we will put aside this very special part of our heritage, hopefully forever, but at the very least until a greater need, even a national emergency, requires us to extract [the oil and gas that may be] hidden beneath its surface."

Denver went on to win a host of awards for his conservation work and found a number of groups dedicated to environmental protection and ending world hunger. But he also found time to be outside, whether fishing for salmon in Alaska or watching the state's remarkable caribou herds embark on their annual migrations across the tundra.

"To be human is to be nourished by the wild country," he once wrote. "To know that there is a place where the eagle flies in freedom, the grizzly walks in majesty, and the caribou runs with the wind across the open tundra, lifts the human spirit." Through his music and public appearances, he also encouraged others to find inspiration in nature and to work, in their own way, to preserve favorite wild places. But he counseled fans not to take on too much. "There are so many things that need to be done that sometimes it seems overwhelming," he told them. "I try to remind everyone that no one person has to do it all, but if each one of us follows our heart and our own inclinations, we will find the small things that we can do. Together we will come up with enough to create a sustainable future and a healthy environment."

Tragically, Denver, the son of a pilot and an enthusiastic amateur flyer himself, was killed in an October, 1997 plane crash. He left behind an impressive legacy, from a host of hummable hits to the scores of national parks and wildlife preserves that he helped establish. There are even John Denver scholarships for young scientists studying ecology. Together, these accomplishments will remind future generations of Denver's commitment to nature.

"I think it's so important that we always remember that nature, environment, wild places, and wild things are a big part of what makes us who and what we are as human beings," he once said. "To deny this is to deny our own heritage, our own spirit, and our own souls."

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/john-denver-let-this-be-a-voice-singing-natures-song-denvers-life-and-work/3085/#.WmY7XXDCXoU.facebook>

### **An Ode to John Denver**

by Liz Seger (1998)

*The man from high Colorado  
Floated on silver wings  
And then fell from the sky  
Into the ocean which he loved  
Too soon, John, too soon.*

*His voice so strong  
Is now silenced  
Except in our memories  
And in our hearts  
Too soon, John, too soon.*

*Whether leavin' on jet plane  
Or coming back home again  
To Aspen's rocky mountain high  
Your spirit soared and you serenaded the  
universe  
Too soon, John, too soon.*

*Who will be our voice  
For our children  
For the forest  
For the ocean  
For the desert  
For the universe  
For Mother Earth?*

*You were aging like good wine  
But we will never know  
How much further you were to go  
Because God took you too soon, John, much too  
soon.  
Peace to you John,*



***Our lyrics are dedicated to Liz Seger, who passed away suddenly on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2018, aged 63***

Some material included in this newsletter has been derived from the public domain, such as the internet and printed media. Articles and reviews are the opinion of the individual writer and as long as the content is of a reasonable nature and it is appropriate, it will be included. Organisations mentioned or featured in this newsletter are included to educate and inform people of their role and purpose. HGA does not profit from including the names of any organisation in this newsletter.

This newsletter is only emailed to those people who have individually contacted HGA and expressed a wish to receive it. Please do not hesitate to let me know if you no longer wish to receive the HGA newsletter.

## Rocky Mountain Suite

*Up in a meadow in Jasper, Alberta  
Two men and four ponies on a long, lonesome ride  
To see the high country and learn of her people  
The ways that they live there, the ways that they die  
One is a teacher, and one a beginner  
Just wanting to be there, wanting to know*

*And together they're trying to tell us a story  
That should have been listened to long, long ago  
How the life in the mountains is living in danger  
From too many people, too many machines  
And the time is upon us, today is forever  
Tomorrow is just one of yesterday's dreams*

*Cold nights in Canada and icy blue winds  
The man and the mountains are brothers again  
Clear waters are laughing, they sing to the skies  
The Rockies are living, they never will die*

*Up in a meadow in Jasper, Alberta  
Two men and four ponies on a long, lonesome ride*

