

Dear Families,

My father played the mandolin and whistled with an expressed joy whenever on holidays he entertained the company that had come to our home for the feasting. Just like a wild songbird up on a branch, our Dad was expressing to each one of us what lived within his heart/mind/soul all the time but which he could not put into words -- and yet he was not really able to be silent about. The tunes were always gay and lively, and even as a child I knew that Dad's music contained as much deep theological power as did his secret prayers for us. I know this for his songs were as happy as happy could be -- and hearing their melodies made us all helplessly happy too. So it was then I began to know that my father was a living saint, and I began to imagine God not as a stern, silent old man but as a very happy person who made music with a wondrous smile on his face.

And so it was I learned at a very early age that music is magical. I discovered that all the while you are listening to it, you become music yourself. Although there was our Dad standing in front of us all sitting around in the parlor of our house and even though there were no words being expressed -- he was playing his mandolin and whistling -- we all knew what he was expressing to us -- we were listening to a language only our souls could understand -- and what his music making was saying to us was the truest of truths: there is love, joy, reason to be happy -- and this message was changing us each for the better. It was good magic and worthy of the holiday feasting soon to follow.

I was reminded of all this just before we all left for Thanksgiving vacation last week. On that Monday morning, our Peter Simms came at arrival time all dressed up in his tuxedo, carrying his acoustic electric guitar, and smiling from ear to ear. He quickly set up along side of me as I sat in the chair by the front door, and as the children began to get out of their cars and walk toward school, he began to play a set of some sweet, happy jazz as a welcoming holiday treat. Peter as you may know is a gifted musician and his music playing was mesmerizing with the pure power of its goodness. The children all began spontaneously to sit down around his feet like disciples around a master of wisdom -- their eyes were wide open and in the silence of their personal appreciation their faces were all smiles. For that long spell of their listening to our Mr. Peter make music, there was no time or space -- they were in the realm of music -- the Kingdom of Kindness -- the Place of Peace and Goodness -- Heaven on Earth. What a perfect Thanksgiving gift you gave us all, Peter Simms -- our master musician. You made the beginning of our National Holiday feasting a happy, happy celebration.

Peace,
Paul