Songs of Healing in a World Torn by War
The Street Spirit Interview with Country Joe McDonald

by Terry Messman

When Country Joe McDonald, one of the major anti-war voices of the Vietnam era, began expressing support and solidarity for military veterans and combat nurses, his eyes were opened to a fuller understanding of the issues of war and peace, and he began writing songs that enlarged our vision of nonviolence and the peace movement.

As he listened to the troops forced to fight the nation’s wars, and learned from combat nurses who cared for grievously wounded and dying soldiers, McDonald’s songs became more deeply expressive of the values of compassion and reconciliation. A seeming paradox lies at the heart of his work: Reverence for life was born amidst the atrocities of war.

McDonald has been a voice for peace for 50 years, stretching all the way back to his days as an anti-war folk singer on the streets of Berkeley in 1965, through his performances at massive antiwar demonstrations in the late 1960s, and up until the present day, when he still sings for peace at anti-war protests and veterans events.

A traveling troubadour for peace, McDonald has performed at anti-nuclear actions at Livermore Lab in California and at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. He has sung for small homeless sleep-outs in Berkeley and gigantic peace rallies at the U.S. Capitol.

Along the way, he has composed a remarkable body of peace anthems. Yet he has also enlarged our understanding of the goals of the peace movement by insisting that the soldiers sent into battle are also victims of war, and that military veterans need to be welcomed home and offered justice when they return.

I interviewed Country Joe McDonald in the North Berkeley home he shares with his wife and family. Joe has been married for 32 years to Kathy McDonald, and he has five children. His wife Kathy is a labor and delivery nurse and midwife. A niece and daughter are nurses. His brother retired as a nurse practitioner from Kaiser after 36 years.

During the interview, I read to McDonald the words of Florence Nightingale, the Crimean War nurse who has become one of his most cherished heroines. Nightingale said, “I stand at the altar of the murdered men and while I live I fight their cause.”

That one sentence speaks volumes. In saying she stands at the altar, she tells us that soldiers have been sacrificed in war, and that their lives are sacred to her. In saying she fights their cause “while she lives,” she dedicates her entire life to them.

The Murdered Men

When I asked McDonald what those words meant to him, he said: “I stand at the altar of the murdered men.”

“I love the word murdered, MURDERED. These men were murdered. They didn’t serve their country. They were murdered. They were murdered not by the enemy. They were murdered by war. They were murdered by your government.”

McDonald has lifted his own voice time and time again for the murdered men, the soldiers and the veterans. He consistently tried to give a voice to the GIs on the front lines, the working-class kids shipped off to hellish fields of slaughter they had no part in creating.

He saw no contradiction between writing anthems of peace in defense of the wounded and dying soldiers led her to become leader of a Veterans Administration outreach center dealing with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder after the war.

When McDonald told Sanddecki how Florence Nightingale returned to England from the Crimean War and refused to talk to her family, or to the press, or anybody, and just snuck home in private, Sanddecki told him that she had come home in secret in exactly the same way from Vietnam.

The Lady with the Lamp

It seems predestined that McDonald’s desire for veterans to be treated with respect and understanding — instead of being written off by their own government — would lead him straight to the woman who provided medical care, compassion and friendship to thousands of soldiers dying alone and friendless on nameless battlefields — Florence Nightingale.

He had soon read everything he could find about Florence Nightingale’s pioneering work in battlefield nursing during the Crimean War. He was so impressed by her dedication and compassion that he
Suitcase Clinic Holds First Town Hall on Homelessness

by Sam Lew

The Suitcase Clinic provides medical services, employment, housing and community resources, a warm meal and a place to chat for our clients. But we ask ourselves how effective we are truly being ourselves and the communities we serve. Do our services aligned with those needs — and, more importantly, is our organization structured so that clients can provide feedback that informs and transforms our services and the way we provide them?

These questions were the ones that spurred the creation of Suitcase Clinic’s first Town Hall on Homelessness, an open forum for homeless people to share their stories, opinions and suggestions around the topic of homelessness.

On Saturday, March 5, 2016, nearly 70 homeless individuals, social service providers and students gathered at the North Berkeley Senior Center to listen and discuss homelessness. The event began with breakfast, followed by public comment and a group discussion about solutions and what could be done next.

The Town Hall focused on homelessness in Berkeley, rather than the Suitcase Clinic’s organization, although many participants were attendees of the clinic.

It was an emotional morning as people voiced their grievances and personal experiences with homelessness. Many of them echoed the feeling of a lack of dignity, particularly with the scarce number of restrooms and showers available to homeless people. Less folks. Both committees meet in the evening, when homeless shelters require people to be back at the shelter.

After the Town Hall, many participants expressed interest in making it a monthly or bi-monthly event. While the Homeless Commission and the Berkeley Task Force are both spaces provided by the City of Berkeley that engage community members to speak and learn about homelessness, they may be inaccessible to homeless folks. Both committees meet in the evening, when homeless shelters require people to be back at the shelter.

Of all the city meetings I go to about homelessness, there are never any homeless people there. But when we connect ourselves, we can make a difference,” said Paul Kecala-Blake, who serves on the Berkeley homeless commission.

James Hynh, Executive Director of the Suitcase Clinic, reflected on the Town Hall, saying, “Someone just walked out of the door and said to me, ‘thank you for giving me a voice,’ but I didn’t give him a voice. We only gave him food.”

“All the content here was generated by those who pioneered the direct action strategy even among local activists. Says Norse, “We should be building on the shoulders of those who pioneered the direct action approach to homeless activism, not relying on the approval of the powerful.”

Many agree with Norse’s point. Here the resolution to create this new Task Force is set for hearing on the Santa Cruz City Council agenda on April 12, and there will certainly be extensive public input concerning formation of the group, the scope of the work, how residents can submit applications and the process by which community members will be appointed to serve. As always, we continue to live in hope.

Steve Pleich is an advocate for people experiencing homelessness in Santa Cruz and Santa Cruz County.

Sleeping Ban Defeat in Santa Cruz Raises Many Questions

by Steve Pleich

The defeat on March 8 of the proposed local sleeping ban by a 5-2 vote of the Santa Cruz City Council was extremely disappointing to advocates for people experiencing homelessness — but not entirely unexpected.

It was the hope of some that the passage of the amendment would, at the very least, signal a willingness on the part of council members to speak and learn about homelessness.

Regrettably, and again not surprisingly, the council members were not moved to have their votes reflect the voices of the people. For decades, the city has progressively sought to criminalize homelessness and the recent vote is little more than a sad confirmation of that well-established and deeply entrenched policy.

One longtime observer commented directly following the vote that “now our community is officially homeless unfriendly.” And while activists and ordinary residents alike are doing considerable soul-searching, the immediate future is not without some hope.

In reaction to this latest refusal by local government officials to recognize even the most basic human rights for people experiencing homelessness, several things happened almost immediately. Some residents sent angry letters or emails to council members or issued passionate public statements decrying the council’s decision. Others, such as members of the Association of Faith Communities of Santa Cruz County, which had unanimously endorsed the amendment, organized a working group to brainstorm and consider options for further action. One positive offshoot of the amendment’s defeat was the proposal of a Joint City/County Task Force on Homelessness which is being put forward, ironically enough, by three of the council members who voted against the amendment.

And though there is always understandable suspicion about the efficacy of the task force model, there is a belief that recommendations in support of revisiting previously defeated initiatives like the safe spaces sleeping program and recreational vehicle parking program, may come from the work of such a group.

Historically in Santa Cruz, we have seen both productive and negligible results from services or changing policies. It means working with homeless people and bringing their often-silenced voices to the forefront in all aspects of anti-homelessness work. As social service providers and activists, we need to constantly examine and re-examine our own organizations to critically evaluate whether or not we are serving the populations we claim to serve as best we can. And perhaps the best way we can do so is simply by asking: what do you think? *** *** *** *** ***

The Suitcase Clinic wants to know your comments, concerns, and suggestions about homelessness and our clinic. Please email SuitcaseShare@gmail.com about things that you want to see changed, solutions you’d like to propose, or if you simply want to become involved with Suitcase Clinic’s advocacy efforts.
April 2016

**Street Spirit**

Mike Deserves a House

**Commentary by Mike Lee**

I realized over breakfast this morning that I am an embarrassment to the city. Here you have public policy spending millions of dollars on people just like me. The end result is that me and mine wind up with a sandwich and maybe a mat on the floor. Once in a while, one of us maybe gets a place inside, because of factors beyond our control.

Playing the housing game is just like playing lots of Vegas. You put your money (or time) in, pull the handle and hope for a positive result. At least in Vegas, if you hit the jackpot you get at least a roast beef sandwich.

It seems that once you attain the status of homelessness, you become a non-person—a body to be pandered to or criminalized. Never mind that at age 60, with an income and no inclination to commit crimes, do drugs or spend all my money at the liquor store, I’m still considered an object to be managed. Talked about in all sorts of ways. Seen but never acknowledged.

Recently I had the misfortune to interact with the City of Berkeley’s newest scheme in combating homelessness. It’s called a coordinated entry system. In a nutshell, it is supposed to be a one-stop shop for homeless services. In reality, it is piles of paperwork and quite frankly, a complete waste of time.

Keep in mind that in my particular instance, I am way over-qualified for services. This is based on federal guidelines which take into account my age, health, and length of homelessness. Not only do I score very high on these factors, I have an income and no current substance issues. I am the poster child for who society wants to see off the sidewalks of Berkeley.

When the guidelines were crafted, it was people just like me that they had in mind to provide a hand up, not a handout.

After endless amounts of time and travel filling out stupid forms, we come to my needing to prove I’m homeless. Just being there proves a need. What, you think somebody with sufficient resources is going to go through this process for your bug-infested hotel room? “Yeah? buddy, I’m not going to pay for a nice clean place. Let’s go live in dirt and bugs.”

Let’s set that silliness aside for a moment and consider who you are intervening. I find myself in the role of being a public figure. It’s not any other day, but a candidate for mayor and a very loud advocate for the community. As such I’m sort of kind of notorious here in Berkeley.

As I walked away from this whole no- sense I thought: my god, if they treat me this way, think of someone in my same exact position who is largely unknown. How do they prove they are homeless?

The City’s embarrassment arises from the fact that despite spending all this money, devising numerous schemes and five-year plans, ad nauseum, they still can’t get one bum off the street. I am proof positive that the system is broken. That it is charity and not solution-based.

I am truly blessed that I enjoy some skill, talents and a reasonable level of intelligence. So much so that recently a member of the dark side said I was one of the more rational and reasonable people on the other side of the aisle. I don’t say these things to pump up my chest, brag or think I’m special, but to point out that if you can’t put me in a house, how is your system going to deal with someone of less abilities or financial resources?

The system is broken and needs to be fixed. You start by looking at this bum’s situation and asking yourself: What kind of system are we going to create to help people like Mike get a house? Not a sandwich or a pat on the head. A hand up and not a hand out.

---

Songs of Peace from the Vietnam Era

**John Lennon:** “Happy Xmas (War Is Over?)”

So and happy Christmas (war is over)
For black and for white (war is over)
Let’s stop all the fight (now)
For yellow and red ones (war is over)
For black and for white (if you want it)
In our world today
Military madness has gone too far
Over and over so they understand
Over and over

**Marvin Gaye:** “What’s Going On”

Father, father, we don’t need to escalate
You see, war is not the answer
for only love can conquer hate

**Buffy Sainte-Marie:** “Universal Soldier”

He’s been a soldier for a thousand years
He fights with missiles and with spears
And the soldiers who are dead and gone,
It’s all over for the unknown soldier
And it’s all over for the unknown soldier
What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!

**The Kinks:** “20th Century Man”

This is the age of machinery, a mechanical nightmare,
The wonderful world of technology,
Napalm, hydrogen bombs, biological warfare,
This is the twentieth century, but too much aggravation
It’s the age of insanity.

**Bobby Darin:** “Simple Song of Freedom”

Come and sing a simple song of freedom
Sing it like you’ve never sung before
Let if fill the air, tell the people everywhere
We, the people here, don’t want a war.

**Holly Near:** “It Could Have Been Me”

Students in Ohio two hundred yards away
Shot down by a nameless fire one early day in May
Some people cried out angry
“You should have shot more of them down”
But you can’t bury youth my friend
Youth grows the whole world round.
It could have been me, but instead it was you
So I’ll keep doing the work you were doing
As I was two

---

Gimmie Some Truth

Compiled by Daniel McMullan

“To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men.”
— Abraham Lincoln

“Words fail, music speaks.”
— Hans Christen Andersen

“Who hears music, feels his solitude
People at once.”
— Robert Browning

“I like beautiful melodies telling me terrible things.”
— Tom Waits

“Music is the great uniter. An incredible force. Something that people who differ on everything and anything else can have in common.”
— Sarah Dessan

“Music... will help dissolve your perplexities and purify your character and sensibilities, and in time of care and sorrow will keep a fountain of joy alive in you.”
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Someday we will live in peace
Tell the leaders of every land
Over and over so they understand
Military madness has gone too far
In our world today
There is no room for war.
Tell the people of all lands
Let’s get together for the future
The future is in our hands.
United nations have to agree
To agree to no war;
How to peace.
We believe in talking not fighting.
— Country Joe McDonald

---

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by American Friends Service Committee. The vendor program is run by J.C. Oron.

Editor, Layout: Terry Messman
Web content: Jace Clarke
Human Rights: Carol Denney
Contributors: Ellen Danich, Carol Denney, Mike Lee, Sam Lew, Daniel McMullan, Jim Marshall, Betsy Morris, Steve Pleich,
All works copyrighted by the authors.

The views expressed in Street Spirit articles are those of the individual authors, not necessarily those of the AFSC.

Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos.
Contact: Terry Messman
Street Spirit, 65 Ninth Street, San Francisco, CA 94103
E-mail: spirit@afsc.org
Web: www.thestreetspirit.org

David Bacon photo
A friend reminded me recently about the San Francisco mayor, Aaron Feinstein was mayor of San Francisco, she thought that homelessness was going to be a brief press photo opportunity. The floating tent town was the idea of mobile cement drain pipes to be used as temporary shelters. The Public Works Department was already adept at curtaining them around; and they were too heavy to steal, unbreakable, semi-private, washable, and available. As you have a little space not competed with, you'll have a sense of my response to tiny houses, the movement for miniature abodes sometimes presented as one solution to the housing crisis.

My friend said that all the contractor proposing the drain pipe shelters was requesting from the city was a “plot to put them on.” And I thought, well, golly. Is that all? Because that’s what Liberty City, the community of tents on Berkeley’s old City Hall in the 1960s, was fighting for. And that’s what the people in tents under the Division Street freeway overpass were requesting after being ejected from a downtown San Francisco Market Street Super Bowl celebration area.

That’s what the community of people living on the Albany Bulb was requesting, but livable micro-units.” The article refers to south of Market Street not far from the foot “affordable rentals” for a development published on April 9, 2015. Local development迷你的房子被拒绝了，因为它们被没有了。得克萨斯人，美国的，对它们的 Tent City, doesn’t it seem a little absurd as a right.

Tiny houses are not necessarily any more problematic than a tent. But the day my city allows the person with the last $1000 to $80,000 tiny house a city-sanctioned public space for his or her charming mini-abode, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.

I do not see either the housing crisis, the cute factor, or both used to create a new tier of underclass in towns as yet untraceable people sitting on the streets as refugees from camps not fit for human habitation and municipal housing policy which created the horror of homelessness out of the whole cloth of greed.

Focusing on the cunning curtains on the adorable windows of the tiny house without first securing the human rights many cities are increasingly subtract from the poor strikes me as falling right out of the developer's or planner's playbook, where individual solutions are prized and larger, collective visions are just somehow too complex for contemplation. The issue isn’t the size (or cuteness) of the house, tent, or place you roll out your sleeping bag and hang your washed-out socks in the nearby tree.

It’s the unwillingness of your town, city, landowner or public official to allow you to be there at all. I’m hoping the seduction of miniaturization doesn’t distract from the call for a right to rest, for human rights, and for housing based on need not wealth, for the millions working, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income seniors who can’t compete in the market designed by and for the one percent.

Tiny houses fall suspiciously into the basket of misconceptions one often hears at planning meetings and zoning hearings most people don’t have time to attend:

1. The misconception that there is not enough land, resources, money to address the housing crisis. This is nonsense. We are a wealthy nation capable of housing the poor. One should never confuse an absence of resources with an absence of political will.
2. The misconception that tiny houses' "cute quotient" will overpower issues of planning and zoning such that the necessary square footage will just magically manifest. Again, this is nonsense: people who have to fight for these projects' peculiar success on politically packed citizen commissions.
3. The misconception that poor people (and apparently nobody else) should start living their lives in miniature. This is not just nonsense, it is offensive.

People just seem to love the idea of these being small, as though poor people somehow need less room than other people. As though they need not sit, not need friends to overstay a meal, etc. Hidden in these assumptions is an assumption that people who have gone through a period of grinding poverty need less light, less space, access to computers, art supplies, pianos, companionship, room for their children, etc. I would argue the opposite.

The main market for tiny houses is wealthy people: land owners and home owners, hoping to situate a temporary guest room where the garden tool shed now resides in an ample backyard and not just in a residentially zoned area. tiny houses magically create square footage, "cute quotient" will overpower issues of planning and zoning such that the necessary square footage will just magically manifest. Again, this is nonsense: people who have to fight for these projects' peculiar success on politically packed citizen commissions.

An unexamined love affair with tiny houses runs the risk of creating what most people in need. And if you think this is a little nutty, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 to $80,000 tiny house a city-sanctioned public space for his or her charming mini-abode, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.

There are several curious implications that seem to enter the room with any discussion of tiny houses. People are talked about in the singular, and it isn’t because tents aren’t aeasthetically appealing. Liberty City was a monument to cleanliness, ordinariness, community, and self-reliance. The idea seems to make even the most intelligent people I know weak in the knees because they just can’t wait to put the tiny structures in their backyard. And if you think this is a little nutty, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.

I do not see either the housing crisis, the cute factor, or both used to create a new tier of underclass in towns as yet untraceable people sitting on the streets as refugees from camps not fit for human habitation and municipal housing policy which created the horror of homelessness out of the whole cloth of greed.

Focusing on the cunning curtains on the adorable windows of the tiny house without first securing the human rights many cities are increasingly subtract from the poor strikes me as falling right out of the developer’s or planner’s playbook, where individual solutions are prized and larger, collective visions are just somehow too complex for contemplation. The issue isn’t the size (or cuteness) of the house, tent, or place you roll out your sleeping bag and hang your washed-out socks in the nearby tree.

It’s the unwillingness of your town, city, landowner or public official to allow you to be there at all. I’m hoping the seduction of miniaturization doesn’t distract from the call for a right to rest, for human rights, and for housing based on need not wealth, for the millions working, people with disabilities, veterans, and low-income seniors who can’t compete in the market designed by and for the one percent.

Tiny houses fall suspiciously into the basket of misconceptions one often hears at planning meetings and zoning hearings most people don’t have time to attend:

1. The misconception that there is not enough land, resources, money to address the housing crisis. This is nonsense. We are a wealthy nation capable of housing the poor. One should never confuse an absence of resources with an absence of political will.
2. The misconception that tiny houses' "cute quotient" will overpower issues of planning and zoning such that the necessary square footage will just magically manifest. Again, this is nonsense: people who have to fight for these projects' peculiar success on politically packed citizen commissions.
3. The misconception that poor people (and apparently nobody else) should start living their lives in miniature. This is not just nonsense, it is offensive.

People just seem to love the idea of these being small, as though poor people somehow need less room than other people. As though they need not sit, not need friends to overstay a meal, etc. Hidden in these assumptions is an assumption that people who have gone through a period of grinding poverty need less light, less space, access to computers, art supplies, pianos, companionship, room for their children, etc. I would argue the opposite.

The main market for tiny houses is wealthy people: land owners and home owners, hoping to situate a temporary guest room where the garden tool shed now resides in an ample backyard and not just in a residentially zoned area. tiny houses magically create square footage, "cute quotient" will overpower issues of planning and zoning such that the necessary square footage will just magically manifest. Again, this is nonsense: people who have to fight for these projects' peculiar success on politically packed citizen commissions.

An unexamined love affair with tiny houses runs the risk of creating what most people in need. And if you think this is a little nutty, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.

There are several curious implications that seem to enter the room with any discussion of tiny houses. People are talked about in the singular, and it isn’t because tents aren’t aeasthetically appealing. Liberty City was a monument to cleanliness, ordinariness, community, and self-reliance. The idea seems to make even the most intelligent people I know weak in the knees because they just can’t wait to put the tiny structures in their backyard. And if you think this is a little nutty, I will be there demanding that the person with less than $10,000 and only a charming tent be allowed the same privilege, and I hope I will not be alone.
A Wide Variety of Tiny Homes Across the Country

by Betsy Morris

The tiny house movement has reached a critical mass — and the folks who are bringing it into public view aren’t the do-it-yourself builders, urban homesteaders, idealistic architects, or proponents of simple living, whether voluntary or not. It’s the homeless activists and advocates, often inspired by religious values or the Occupy movement around the country, who are announcing settlement of tiny houses every month or so. The Bay Area may be catching up shortly. Here are a few stories for your consideration.

On November 21, 2014, the nonprofit Occupy Madison (OM) got their Occupancy Permit for a Village of up to ten tiny homes. On November 22, the OM team helped the first villagers move in. Betty and Chris had been living in Berkeley that’s looking like a possible candidate for their own little cohousing community, a vest-pocket neighborhood of 8 tiny homes and a common house.

Many of the youth live in shelters or couch-surf. They’re all part of Youth Spirit Artworks, a special place where they can go while juggling jobs, school, recovery, and living in temporary shelters that require that they leave every morning and return as volunteer staff. They’ve just finished their first meet-up with Berkeley City Councilmember Dan Kalb for a plenary session and kind of frustrating discussion about gentrification, racial change, homeownership, and culture shock, and an analysis of who is doing what to help fund more resources for youth living in shelters in Berkeley. They already know they want a hand in building the village. Elloquent and prob- ing questions allow them to explore the possibilities and challenges of self-governance, of choosing members, and living cooperatively in close quarters. They ask probing questions and attempt to visualize the possibilities.

“What if we had a counselor living there, or on call nearby?” “We could buddy up and have ‘safe words’ to let each other know when we’re about to melt down so we don’t take it out on each other.” “Would we really keep the animals little where we could let it all out?” “I know someone from the city who said we could get a portable dog run built.” “If we could raise money for counselors or teachers to help us, we could create jobs!” “Maybe we can hire folks who know who are trying to get a job, but just missed a point on the test, and need more experience.” “Why ever not just call the police? That doesn’t feel safe.” “Only if someone really can’t keep our agreements and they might harm someone, then the police can handle that.” “Should we just look for recovery? Or ones with jobs?” “We could help each other find jobs — there’s a lot of them down there.” “It’s easy to bike around in Berkeley, but it’s a tough place for a bus — straight to Oakland, if you had a place to lock up bicycles inside a gate.” “But there are so many people who need help: let’s remember to give back to the community.”

The Youth Spirit Artworks team, members of the Liberty City experiment like Mike Zettlemoyer, and local homeless activists and affordable housing advocates in the Berkeley Tiny Home Villages Study Group will be attending City Council meetings to push for rapid action on the promises of the Emergency Shelter measure passed in January. Look for more news about that.

On November 21, 2014, the nonprofit Occupy Madison (OM) got their Occupancy Permit for a Village of up to ten tiny homes. On November 22, the OM team helped the first villagers move in. Betty and Chris had been living in their own tiny house for nearly a year on the street without running water or electricity, moving every 24 or 48 hours to comply with parking requirements. Their little house on a trailer now shares water, electricity, flush toilets, showers, laundry, a kitchen and more with four other households. The village is governed by members and the formerly homeless members of the Village share representation on the Board of Occupy Madison. Each one signs a community agreement to be a good neighbor, and within the first year, the residents was asked to leave for ‘egregious’ violations. It was a hard decision, the president of the Board and OM Village member abstained.

Occupy Madison Village is based on Dignity Village in Portland, Oregon. What started as homeless activists claim- ing space under a bridge in downtown Portland has now grown into a 60-person village with tiny homes built of recycled materials by residents and volunteers.

Community members practice self-governance, selecting their own fellow members under their own community agreements in partnership with a nonprofit sponsor that helps with negotiations with the city which owns the land.

It is further from downtown jobs and services, and by the terms of their lease with the city, residents can only stay for two years (except for those who handle important day-to-day responsibilities as volunteer staff). But, there is a lot of mutual support for recovery, job place- ment, transits and the like. One of the hardest things, according to a student researcher at MEVA, is the lack of privacy over the porta-potties and shared showers. A little more space and a little more soundproofing could go a long way.

Opportunity Village in Eugene, Oregon, was also inspired by Dignity Village and the Occupy Movement. The instigator, Andy Heber, a young city planner, researched and wrote Tent City Urbanism, an excellent book that com- bines a contemporary history of homeless encampments, and a guide to creating a self-governing tiny village home.

Heber cites the influence of cohousing design and intentional communities, as well as classic patterns of villages councils behind the Development of Opportunity Village. The Village is on land approved and leased by the city, on the outskirts of Eugene in a commercial/light industrial neighborhood. Car parking (mostly for vis- itors or staff) is off to the side.

For more information on these self-governing tiny home villages see www.VillageCollaborative.com or www.Foursquarevillages.com and www.tentcityurbanism.com

A couple hours north of Eugene is Quixote Village in Olympia, Washington. It is also on land leased by the city, but a lot of money went into grading the land, moving dirt, building 30 tiny houses and a large, permanent office and commons building. Quixote Village is sponsored by a faith-based nonprofit called Panza. Panza set up the village with input from a group of homeless men over several years of talks. That village is not self-governing. Members were selected by a professional manager who can request drug tests and evict members who don’t follow through on problems they are causing.

Here in California and the Bay Area, we don’t have legal pathways to tiny home villages yet, but a few pioneers are working on that. Mobile homes, campers, trailers, manufactured homes, RVs, house-cars, converted trucks, vans, house boats, and backyard sheds have been codi- fied as uninhhabitable or zoned nearly to the point of extinction. (Mobile Home parks are protected in the state like an endangered species.)

Creating community is something for- mer homeless artists/activists out on the Alban Bulb knew well. However, there are also “sustainability pioneers” who have found ways to create tiny home vil- lages behind the fences in commercial and industrial areas.

Fresno has become the first city in California to legalize tiny homes for back- yard cottages. The City of Fresno has started the process of change. As of January 3, 2016, property owners in resi- dential neighborhoods with an existing home can add one tiny home in the back- yard to the types of secondary structures they can rent or live in.

These recently added tiny homes are defined as registered RVs with at least 100 square feet of floor-living space, with legal kitchen and bath, that can be towed but not driven.

DEFINITIONS

Despite enormous free documentation by the National Tiny House Association, numerous blogs, articles, books, document- ary, and meet-up groups of tiny home fans around the country, the media is struggling to understand what tiny homes are. One national paper said tiny houses were 1000 square feet or less. The San Francisco Chronicle, in a recent arti- cle in mid-March, identified tiny homes as 300 to 500 square feet. No, no, no!

Let’s get a few things straight. The tiny house movement, by and large, is about free-standing structures small enough and light enough to tow behind your basic pick-up truck, using wood (preferably natural and re-used), not the plastic and aluminum of your basic RV, camper or van, although used shipping containers and converted buses and vans can be adapted to the fold.

So here are some basics: A tiny home that is legally towable by a lightweight truck constrains you to a structure 8 feet wide and 20 feet long, or 160 square feet. But those trailers are pretty expensive, often the single largest expense, in fact.

There’s a lot of competition in the tiny house world to find the most artful, effi- cient, and functional gadgets (furniture, utility systems, boat heaters, composting toilets) to live comfortably and beautifully in a space designed to fit the owner like a glove. All that and the charm too.

So many fully featured tiny homes (with bath and kitchen) might go as low as 75 square feet, while ones without amenities (basically a shed) may be even smaller (8 by 8 feet or 6 by 9 feet). Some people even make smaller ones, basically something you can tow by bicycle, a lock- able box with a window or glass door. If you want examples of those, go to Wood Street in Oakland; along the line from American Steel north to Emeryville, you can see these little boxes mixed up with tents and tarps balanced precariously on the curb in front of a mile of chain-link fence protecting acres of California native weeds from the humans.
Country Joe McDonald performed anti-war songs at Livermore Lab on Hiroshima Day, August 6, 2015.

Ellen Danchik photo
eminence voices calling on the nation to honor its veterans. His work in this area has helped to awaken many people.

**VIETNAM NEVER AGAIN**

This melodic celebration is sung to the voice of a GI struck by shrapnel and locked in Long Binh Jail, a military stockade in South Vietnam. It describes the alienation of GI against the rest of society — including presidents, generals, business- men, even hippies — by setting up a series of effective contrasts showing how business leaders, journalists, and veterans suffered from the weapons of war.

“I’d like to be a business man again. I want to sell things again. Instead of in this tank with rounds coming in. I’d like to be the President talking to the press. Instead of here in Khe Sanh with shrapnel in my chest.”

**MOANING BLOUES**

“Moanin’ Blues” is a requiem for an entire generation. It is a most haunting affecting song on Vietnam Experience, a plaintive country blues that McDonald sings in a Bakersfield bar.

“It’s the kind of song that could have been sung as a country lament by Merle Haggard in a Bakersfield bar or as a blues number by Hot Lips Page on the streets of Memphis. It’s that timeless.

No rocking anti-war lyrics here, no battle- field fireworks, just sorrow and emptiness at the loss of a life. It has a theme as old as the hills, and as sad as the blues.

“Someone I love has passed away. Their soft face is now with me today. I feel so lonely and so empty without them in my world.”

It could have been written by anyone who ever lost a lover or a child or a par- ent, and McDonald sings it slowly, in a beautifully expressive vocal, melancholy and aching with loss.

“You miss your wife when it’s gone, dean. Can’t stop these tears fall from my eyes.”

Those words come straight from the heart and from the blues; they strike a deep chord. The lyrics are a direct echo of the Mississippi Delta blues, summoned from the past by McDonald to express the loss of a loved one in a burning heart.

It may be a lament by a soldier who has lost his best friend on the battlefield. Or the tears of a wife who has lost her hus- band in the war. Or the sorrow of a mother and father for the son who never returned home.

Or the sense of loss of children left fatherless for the rest of their lives.

It is an elegy for every combat nurse who tended a soldier’s lonely death in Vietnam, and for the sisters and brothers of veterans who wound up homeless and lost on the streets, and disappeared into obliv- ion.

It could have been sung by the parents of strangers who lived at Quantico National Guard at Quantico and Jackson State.

It’s a ballad for every man and woman scarred irreparably in Vietnam. It’s the long-term suffering of the unknown soldier.

**WELCOME HOME**

“Welcome Home” is a joyous pop- rock song with an upbeat melody that cel- ebrates the homecoming of Vietnam vet- erans. In describing this song, McDonald said it was inspired by the women who served in Vietnam, McDonald welcomes home brothers and sisters alike.

“Welcome home, brother; welcome home. Welcome home, sister welcome home.”

The song addresses the deep divisions caused by the war, but appeals for recon- ciliation between all sides of the conflict.

“Some refused to go and some went away to fight. Everyone wants to know

who was wrong and who was right.”

But the war is over, and the opposing sides may never agree, so it’s time to get together and say: “Welcome home!”

McDonald was asked to write “Welcome Home” by a Navy veteran named Alan Bacall who was working on a film of a large parade held to welcome home Vietnam veterans. Since the nation had failed to welcome the soldiers return- ing from the war, it fell to a veteran film- maker and a veteran songwriter to step up and say, “Welcome home.”

**SONGS FROM THE SLAUGHTER MILL**

In the midst of the Vietnam War, Country Joe recorded War War War War War War War, an eloquent set of anti-war songs with music by McDonald and lyrics from an entirely unexpected source: the poems of Robert W. Service. McDonald first released the album in 1971, and then performed it live for release on CD in 2007, at a “Peace and Reconciliation” honoring U.S. Vietnam War veterans in Berkeley’s Claremont.

Service called his poems “songs from the slaughter mill.” The collaboration between the “Bag of the Yokum,” and the Berkeley acid-rocker is one of the most powerful indictments of war ever recorded.

War War War captures the anguish of soldiers cut apart by what Service calls the “ravenous guns” of war, but also expresses the regret of an arms merchant for profiting from slaughter, and the grief of a father who lost his beloved son on the battleground. The record culminates in a hellish vision of a platoon of soldiers screaming shell and the battle hell.” He waits for his son to come home.

Service’s remarkable poems. It is an album that has helped to awaken many people. It is the most beautifully powerful indictments of war ever recorded.

When the narrator’s son joins the army at the age of 17 to fight in World War I, he finds some saving grace in his son’s death, McDonald’s poignant vocal is full of empathy for the father’s over- whelming love and sorrow.

The father’s words of farewell to his son when he first left for war now seem like a harbinger of loss.

“God bless you and keep you, Young fellow my lad, You’re all of my life, you know.”

All too soon, the father receives the message that all parents of soldiers fear and dread. His son has fallen to “the screaming shell and the battle hell”. He will never come home again.

And to the father is his memories, and the hopes and dreams he once held for his son. He tries mightily to find some saving grace in his son’s death, some sense that he will live on.

“So you’ll live, you’ll live, Young fellow my lad, In the gleam of the evening star. In the wood-note wild

And the laugh of the child. In all sweet things that are.”

One might search for a very long time, and look through every song written about war in our lifetime, to find such a moving expression of the broken-hearted love of parents who have lost a child in war.

This beautiful song by McDonald and Service helps us understand one of the most shattering costs of war — the immeasurable sense of loss and the per- manent heartache of parents who will never again see their child return home.

**PEACE ON EARTH**

“Peace on Earth”

Many years after the peace demonstra- tions of the 1960s had ended, McDonald would sing “Peace on Earth” at anti-war demonstrations. He often sang it at protests against U.S. wars of intervention in Central America and rallies against nuclear arms.

There is no room for war.

Over and over so that they understand

Military madness has gone too far

In today’s world.

There is no room for war.

McDonald has never stopped singing for peace. He has spoken out against war for his entire lifetime, and also has honed the nation’s military veterans, even in times of great national confusion over their role.

In describing a tribute to veterans at Berkeley’s Vietnam Memorial, he wrote: “There was no anger or hostility, just com- plete agreement that blaming soldiers for war is unpatriotic.”

Bob Dylan once described the chorus of freedom fasting “for each and every underdog soldier in the night.” Through thick and thin, McDonald has demanded that the underdog soldiers of the night be treated with compassion and justice.

In doing so, he has been an important example to the general public, and has expanded our concept of nonviolence to include the front-line soldiers and combat veterans who have returned from combat. Our war movement must find compassion for all the victims of war, including the ones shipped off in uniforms to faraway battlefields.

Making this point is the song’s sweeping look at the work of his great hero, Florence Nightingale, who said, “I stand at the altar of the murdered men and while I live I fight their cause.”

**THE MARCH OF THE DEAD**

How else to end this song-cycle but with “The March of the Dead,” a fever- dream, a nightmare, a prophecy and part ghost story. At first, the song may seem the delightful ravings of battle fatigue or the hallucinations of hell. But it may be a sing-song with sol- diers rising from their graves to warn humanity away from the path of war.

At a parade celebrates one of the nation’s triumphant troops now that the war is over. But, in truth, it is not war. It never ended. It never ended for the vast, haunted generations of the dead, the ranks of ruin,” in Service’s memorable phrase.

The Army of the Dead marches into the victory parade, just as they come march- ing in — unseen and uninvited — to cast a pall over every celebration of war.

McDonald’s vocals capture the dread of that moment when the dead come home to display the horrifying costs of war.

“The folks were white and stricken, each tongue seemed weighed with lead; Each heart was clutched in hollow hand of ice; And every eye was staring at the horror of the dead, The horror of the men who sold the price.”

Florence Nightingale once said that she could never forget the thousands of sol- diers singing in filling stations, “If Service witnessed the same appalling loss of life, including the loss of his own brother, he, too, could never forget.

McDonald’s voice sounds haunted when he sings the words that tell us what we owe the veterans of our nation’s wars.

To God, in Thy great mercy, Let us nevermore forget

The graves they left behind, The bitter graces.

McDonald rescued those eloquent words from the oblivion of time. Service’s poems would very likely have been lost and forgotten, except that McDonald rescued them back in time and rediscovered them, and then created music that gave new life to the lyrics in all their prophetic urgency, as told by Robert W. Service. Music by Country Joe McDonald.

**THE MARCH OF THE DEAD**

How else to end this song-cycle but with “The March of the Dead,” a fever- dream, a nightmare, a prophecy and part ghost story. At first, the song may seem the delightful ravings of battle fatigue or the hallucinations of hell. But it may be a sing-song with sol- diers rising from their graves to warn humanity away from the path of war.

At a parade celebrates one of the nation’s triumphant troops now that the war is over. But, in truth, it is not war. It never ended. It never ended for the vast, haunted generations of the dead, the ranks of ruin,” in Service’s memorable phrase.

The Army of the Dead marches into the victory parade, just as they come march- ing in — unseen and uninvited — to cast a pall over every celebration of war.

McDonald’s vocals capture the dread of that moment when the dead come home to display the horrifying costs of war.

“The folks were white and stricken, each tongue seemed weighed with lead; Each heart was clutched in hollow hand of ice; And every eye was staring at the horror of the dead, The horror of the men who sold the price.”

Florence Nightingale once said that she could never forget the thousands of sol- diers singing in filling stations, “If Service witnessed the same appalling loss of life, including the loss of his own brother, he, too, could never forget.

McDonald’s voice sounds haunted when he sings the words that tell us what we owe the veterans of our nation’s wars.

To God, in Thy great mercy, Let us nevermore forget

The graves they left behind, The bitter graces.

McDonald rescued those eloquent words from the oblivion of time. Service’s poems would very likely have been lost and forgotten, except that McDonald rescued them back in time and rediscovered them, and then created music that gave new life to the lyrics in all their prophetic urgency, as told by Robert W. Service. Music by Country Joe McDonald.
Songs of Healing by Country Joe McDonald

from page 1

grew on a pilgrimage to England, visiting her home in Enfield, her summer home in Derbyshire, and her gravesite at East Wellow. He journeyed to the Selimiye Barracks in Scutari (Turkey) where she cared for the victims of the Crimean War.

McDonald finally compiled a compre- hensive archive of her life and times, and created a Florence Nightingale website. He recently devoted his entire archive to the UCSF Nursing School.

A TRIBUTE TO NIGHTINGALE

He also began offering a “Tribute to Florence Nightingale” that tells her story in her own words and anecdotal performance. McDonald greatly admires Nightingale’s compassion and dedication for the front lines. He says about the songs about nursing. His tribute is a reve- lation of her works of mercy.

Florence Nightingale gave comfort to thousands of gravely ill and wounded sol- diers during the Crimean War. In doing so, she created a compassionate new standard for battlefield medical care. She trained 38 volunteer nurses and 15 mans and burned nursing soldiers at Scelimi Barracks in Scutari (near Istanbul, Turkey) in November 1854. During the first bitter winter, more than 4,000 soldiers died at Scutari from battle wounds, typhus, cholera and dysentery.

In his tribute, McDonald explains that along with her pioneering role in combat nursing, Nightingale defied the patriarchy of her day to become a strong advocate for the independence and rights of women.

“In the end,” McDonald said, “she was to bring a health and comfort to the sick on the field as she had never been seen or conceived of before. And to the idle and disrespected women of her time, and for- ever after, she brought forth a profession and lifted the status of nursing and independ-ence never seen before.”

His admiration for her acts of mercy led her to become one of the few women in Victorian England who rejected the patri- archy, rejected marriage, and chose a career of caring for dying soldiers, instead of having children of her own. She feels the nursing profession has been a calling of a mother for the wounded, maimed and dying soldiers she calls her children.

That insight runs very deep. Nightingale was one of the rare women in Victorian England who rejected the patri-archy, rejected marriage, and chose a career of caring for dying soldiers, instead of having children of her own. She feels the nursing profession has been a calling of a mother for the wounded, maimed and dying soldiers she calls her children.

Nightingale was not only the soldier’s friend. She was a fierce warrior on their behalf, and McDonald gives voice to her “state of chronic rage” against the military system that had abandoned thousands of soldiers to misery and death. With a kind of furious urgency, he recites Nightingale’s own suggestion of that “long, dreadful winter” in Scutari.

“I am in a state of chronic rage. I who saw men down across all that long, dreadful winter without any other covering than a dirty blanket and a pair of old regimental trousers, when we knew the stores were bursting with warm cloth- ing. Living skeletons, deformed by ver- min, ulcerated, hopeless, speechless, dying as they wrapped their heads in their blankets and spoke never a word.”

As McDonald pointed out in our inter- view, Nightingale was known as the sol- dier’s only friend who nursed them when they were wounded and sick, and wrote to their families when they died. No one had before had done that for the families of soldiers slain in battle.

Nightingale said, “I personally tended two thousand such needless deaths in that terrible winter when the ink froze in my inkwell as I wrote those endless letters home, when the patients’ limbs and boots froze together and had to be cut apart.”

McDonald’s work in studying Florence Nightingale’s lifelong acts of mercy and caregiving may be the culmination of his own lifelong search for answers to the great questions of war and peace. McDonald emphasizes that Nightingale denounced the system that caused the murder and destruction of countless sol- diers, while offering the world a vision of compassion and caregiving.

Nightingale’s vision brings together and unites (the seemingly) contrasting opposites of McDonald’s own life: his fiery challenges to the war machine, on the one hand, and the great respect and support for military veterans, on the other.

On the surface, it may seem contradicto- ry to struggle against the nation’s wars while supporting and defending the soldiers that fight and die in them; but the life of Florence Nightingale shows us clearly that she, too, was in “a state of chronic rage” against the war machine, while supporting the soldiers caught up in it. It was her life-long work to show that love and mercy must be given to all of us.

In his tribute, just before he says his song, “The Lady with the Lamp,” McDonald offers a memorable reflection on the way Nightingale’s life was changed forever by the dying soldiers she could never forget.

“The lady with the lamp.” Florence Nightingale at Scutari with her lamp at a patient’s bedside in the Crimean War. Lithograph of a painting by Henrietta Rye.

Down those endless lines of bleeding and moaning men walked the Lady with the Lamp. Florence Nightingale is a shining icon of mercy — a light in the darkness of war. She is an eternal part of the conscience of humanity.

Florence Nightingale said she had seen hell, and because she had seen hell, she was set apart. Between her and every normal human pleasure, every normal human enjoyment, must stand the wards of Scutari. She could never forget.

And then McDonald performs one of his finest anti-war songs, and yet it is much more than that. It is a warning to all of us — and especially to civilians who have never seen battlefield casualties — of the terrible price that soldiers must pay.

His song is a beautiful portrayal of “Florence Nightingale, the Lady with the Lamp, carrying her lamp every night as she walked down a four-mile row of cots 18 inches apart, tending to hundreds and hundreds of wounded and dying men.

“First they use us
And then they throw us away.
Only Miss Nightingale
Knows the price that we pay.

They treated her as a professional angel sent from heaven. She never ran from the shot and the shell. She bravely faced death to save the lives of soldiers. She lived out her life in a world ruled by men. Every time they knocked her down she got back up again.

Civil War veterans told of Clara Barton with tears in their eyes, McDonald sings, because “braved the battle” to save their lives. She never ran from the shot and the shell. She bravely faced death to save the lives of soldiers. She lived out her life in a world ruled by men. Every time they knocked her down she got back up again.

The nurses written about by Country Joe McDonald add up to an Angel Band. They offer an entirely different vision of wartime heroism — a better vision — by bravely bringing mercy and healing into dangerous war zones where medical care is a matter of life or death.

Clara Barton in the Civil War, Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War, Harriet Tubman in the American Civil War, and countless other unsung heroines, have offered the light of mercy and healing in the darkest hours and in most dangerous places. They all shine on.
“It Was a Moment of Peace and Love”  
The Street Spirit Interview with Country Joe McDonald

Interview by Terry Messman

Street Spirit: You first sang “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag” on the streets of Berkeley during the Vietnam War in 1965. Fifty years later, you sang at an anti-nuclear protest at Livermore Laboratory on Hiroshima Day. Could you have imagined in 1965 that your song would still have so much meaning today?

McDonald: Actually, I find the concept of 50 years incomprehensible. But it does make me appreciate and reflect on the years that I have in retirement. I have children and some of those children have children, and I know that the math is right. And I just finished an album and the title of it is “50” because it’s 50 years since the first album. It’s called “Goodbye Blues.” I didn’t die, so there you are. I’m still alive and I’m still doing something. And filling a need, a lot, and it keeps me sane.

Spirit: Your songs really entwined the Hiroshima Day protest at Livermore last summer.

McDonald: Well, I’m glad. I’ve done lots of these events. I grew up in a family of radicals, and quite honestly, I really get bored with the theory and specificity of various movements and philosophies from the left. It doesn’t mean I don’t support them. But as an entertainer, I know that you can lose your audience. I’ve been doing this for so long, time, and I consider myself a morale-booster for these causes. I don’t do it if I don’t support the cause and the ideas and the people that are doing it. It’s really quite remarkable what people are doing in many movements.

I like to support these movements because they are sometimes not mainstream and no one else is supporting them, so I feel an obligation to do it. As an activist, I like to give a voice and to support people and movements that don’t have mainstream support and visibility. And I realize that my name has a certain meaning. I think that my presence can be a morale-booster.

Spirit: Your wife and I were at your concert at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley back on Nov. 7, 2014, and supposed that you were pregnant at that time. Yet you’re still singing all over the place.

McDonald: Well that was a weird month. I actually did retire three months before that concert. Yet you’re still singing all over the place.

I had been in the Navy for three years, and that’s a long time, and I was just happy that I finished it and I was starting strumming on my guitar, and I strummed what turned into the music for the chorus of “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag.” And then I started writing and I wrote the whole song in about 30 minutes. I thought it was a pretty productive day.

Spirit: “I Feel Like I’m Fixin’ to Die Rag” has kind of a perfect Berkeley origin story on the University of California’s Sproul Plaza at the height of the antiwar movement. Is it true that you and Barry Melton recorded an early version of “Fixin’ to Die Rag” and played it on a table at Sproul Plaza in 1965?

McDonald: Yes. I moved to Berkeley in the summer of 1965, after the Free Speech Movement. So I came up here from southern California and got miraculously tapped into the folk music thing that was happening at that time. I met Barry Melton at the University of California folk festival, and we hit it off. I started playing a few of my songs, and he played lead guitar. We were a duo then. Then I met some other people, and ED Denson, Mike Beardslde and I started putting out a little magazine called Rag Baby. We put out several issues of Rag Baby. It was a biweekly that had music articles and schedules of things that were happening around town, music and dancing events. It was mostly focused on folk music and the folk scene.

Then in September of 1965, the publication date came and we didn’t have any copy for the magazine. You understand the problem of not having copy! The publication date came and we had nothing, even though there was a lot of stuff happening at that time.

Spirit: Yes, didn’t you release some songs instead as a musical magazine?

McDonald: I had been approached to write some music for a play that Sara Payton had written about the Vietnam War. I was working on a song for the play about three Vietnamese revolutionary soldiers before a battle, and the lyrics were expressing their thoughts before a battle. I had been in the Navy for three years, and I knew what a man always internalizes into his point of view. So I wrote this song called “Who Am I?” as a song that’s very loved now. “Who Am I?” was released on the second Country Joe & The Fish album.

It took two or three days to write the lyrics; it was kind of difficult. But I finally got it, and I sat back in my chair and I was just happy that I finished it and I started strumming on my guitar, and I strummed what turned into the music for the chorus of “I Feel Like I’ Fixin’ to Die Rag.” And then I started writing and I wrote the whole song in about 30 minutes. I thought it was a pretty productive day.

Spirit: Pretty productive! You were an unknown street musician and you suddenly came up with a very moving song, “Who Am I?” and then the “Fixin’ to Die Rag” that would live on as one of the most important antiwar anthems of the 1960s.

McDonald: The only reason I could write those lyrics was having grown up in a socialist family. My parents were members of the Communist Party when I was born, but later became disenchanted with them. And then they became part of the Progressive Party and the left socialist parties that were around.

I read the leftist newspapers and I was familiar with the basic tenets of socialism about the industrial complex that generates war. So I was able to write lyrics about the warmakers that profit from war, and I was able to write a lyric from the point of view of the soldier because I had been in the military.

Also, I felt disenchanted from my parents, in a way. As far as politics, we didn’t have a very good relationship, so it was easy for me to say: “Come on mothers throughout the land, pack your boys off to Vietnam.” And that sarcasm was a really nice thing, and GIs love sarcasm.

The important thing about the “Fixin’ to Die Rag” was that it had a new point of view that did not blame soldiers for war. It just blamed the politicians and it blamed the manufacturers of weapons. It didn’t blame the soldiers. Someone who was in the military could sing the song, and the attitude is, “Whoopee, we’re all going to die.”

I had been in Japan in the Navy as a young officer, and at a point, I started thinking to myself, “I want to get the hell out of here.” And then realizing, “Wait a minute, I can’t get out of here.” I have this weird (military) haircut, I have no civilian clothes, I have no money. I’d have to get a passport and get on a plane, and I’d never bought an airline ticket, I was stuck, I was screwed. And I knew that attitude. It was: “Oh well, I’m going to finish out my enlistment.” And when they asked me to re-enlist, I said, “No thank you.”

Spirit: Did you find that soldiers liked “Fixin’ to Die Rag” since it mocks Wall Street and the generals, but not the soldiers shipped to Vietnam?

McDonald: Oh they love it, yeah. They really do like it because it speaks the truth.

Most peace songs of the era blamed the soldiers for the war. As a matter of fact, I remember the Baez sisters (Joan Baez and Mimi Farina) had this poster with them saying, “Girls says yes to boys who say no.” I can believe you could just say, “No, I don’t want to be in this war.”

But it was not that easy. As a matter of fact, it was almost impossible when you were in the military. Most civilians — even civilians on the left, which is really a crime — do not understand the Uniform Code of Military Justice. It governs you when you’re in the military. It’s a contract unlike any other contract. It can’t really be broken. And in times of war, they can just shoot you. The grease that makes the military run is that if you disobey a direct order in times of war, it’s punishable by death. They can imprison you. People were put in Long Binh Jail in South Vietnam. They were beaten.

Spirit: So it was easy for activists to expect GIs to resist, but they had little understanding of the risks they faced.

McDonald: I mean, the military is a killing machine, and you have to do your job. If you think it’s easy to get out of it once you’re in it, you’re stupid. As a matter of fact, you can be extended for as long as you want. So in that sense, it’s really like being in the Mafia.

When you’re in the military, you know that. I don’t know that it’s even possible for civilians to understand. But it’s very, very important for civilians to understand the workings of the military and what the military machine entails, and I don’t know if it will ever happen.

I now know more than I want to know. The situation today is quite a bit better. But in 1965, I think that most anti-war people were convinced without a doubt that the military personnel were responsible for the war, and if they would only stop fighting, the war would stop. And people demonstrated against soldiers coming back, not as much as the right wing would like us to believe, but they did.

There were very few people that embraced soldiers caught in that conundrum. The American Friends Service Committee was certainly one of them. But mostly, GIs helped themselves with the GI movement.

Spirit: Do you think there is greater public understanding and support today for the soldiers forced to fight the wars?

McDonald: Yes, that has changed now. I don’t think anybody in the country would blame an Iraqi war veteran for the war in Iraq. That’s not happening any way it was. You still sing on the streets and in concert at the Freight and Salvage in Berkeley today.
Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 9

Longer.

Spirit: In “Vietnam Veteran Still Alive,” you wrote about a patriotic kid who went to Vietnam, but after the war, he found that “I’m back home and I’m the enemy.” Do the veterans you’ve talked with feel they were blamed for a war they had no part in starting?

McDonald: You know, the American Legion did not admit Vietnam veterans during the war in Vietnam and after the war in Vietnam — because they “lost the war.”

Spirit: That was really their feeling — that the soldiers lost the war?

McDonald: That’s right. They were cowards and they lost the war. I’ve met many, many fathers who died estranged from their sons because they couldn’t stop blaming their sons for either refusing to be in the draft, or coming back after losing the war, and then speaking out against the war.

So that’s the right wing and the mainstream of America. But I also have met people who were spit on and were called terrible names. My friend Jack McCloskey worked with Vietnam Veterans Against the War and was instrumental in starting the peer-group counseling that saved so many Vietnam veterans from post-traumatic stress horrors.

He always complained because he and Ron Kovac and all those Vietnam vets were put into the vanguard of the peace actions. Once the left wing decided that they were potent symbols and a force to be reckoned with as far as the anti-war movement was concerned, they put them in the front of the march. They always put them in the front of the march, and Jack McCloskey said, “So we always get beat up.” They sacrificed them for the country. I have not sent them to Vietnam, and the left wing sacrificed them by putting them in the front of the march.

Spirit: Many activists admired the VVAW, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War, for becoming such a strong part of the anti-war movement in the late ’60s and early ’70s. But is that really what they felt, that they were sacrificed by putting them in the front of the peace actions?

McDonald: They sent them back lots of times, when they were shell-shocked. They sent them back.

Spirit: The military sent them back to the front lines?

McDonald: Back to the front lines. And in World War I, they sent them back. They would burn them with cigarettes and beat them up and stuff and call them cowards. It’s tragic and it’s horrible. It is just so horrible.

Spirit: For a voice of antwar protest, you express an unusual amount of empathy for the experience of soldiers. Does what you describe as the only treatment for PTSD come from being a veteran?

McDonald: I could write the songs that I write because I was a military veteran and my parents were socialists. Also my mother, Florence McDonald, was Jewish, and her mother was an immigrant from Russia, escaping the pogroms of the Czar. And her father was also an immigrant from Russia.

So by a very early age, I understood the Holocaust and the reality of the Holocaust — the death camps, the person who made setsas out of the skin of Jews. And my mother told me, “When the pogroms come, they’ll get you.”

So I’ve never believed that I was safe, which is another element. I could identify completely with soldiers in Vietnam not feeling safe, surrounded by death, with people hunting them and wanting to kill them. Because, you know, Nazis wanted to kill Jews. They wanted to put them in cages and fry them and kill them. So that is imprinted in my mind and is part of my worldview.

Also, my father (Worden McDonald) was Jewish, and my mother was a corpsman with the Marines in World War II. And Toshi said, “Well, we had a fine grant from Russia.”

And my mother told me, “When the war ended, I thought it was pretty rough on our family when my father was investigated. I remember it and it was terrible. I was a child and I was scared.”

And Toshi said, “Well, we had a fine time. Our neighbors stuck right by us.”

And I said, “Well, during those times, as a teenager, it was hard.”

Toshi said, “We didn’t have that problem in our family.”

And Toshi, her daughter, said, “Well, I’m never going to talk about it!” So these events impact the family, and I was well aware of that. War impacts the families of the veterans. It impacts the community. It impacts the children. And I found war and the dynamics of war extremely interesting. And the only way I can keep from going nuts about what I learned about veterans and war is to write music about it.

Spirit: On the way to your house today, I was listening to your “Vietnam Experience” CD. A song about Agent Orange describes a soldier who feels paranoid and edgy, like there are enemies everywhere and they’re going to kill him.

McDonald: And they were going to kill him! That’s right.

Spirit: Even the bushes where Agent Orange was sprayed are going to kill him.

McDonald: Not only was the enemy trying to kill him, but his government was trying to kill him! And not only tried to kill him, but did kill him! One of my best friends died of Agent Orange complications.

Spirit: When did you become so involved in supporting the rights of veterans, and get involved with Swords to Plowshares, the VVAW, and Vietnam Veterans of America?

McDonald: I went to an event at the Veterans Memorial Building in Berkeley in 1981 on the problems of Vietnam veterans, attended by movers and shakers in the movement. I met Jack McCloskey, who was a corporan with the Marines in Vietnam and also was involved in the healing from the Vietnam War.

I came to that event at the Veterans Building as a rock musician, a singer and entertainer supporting veterans, because I wanted to support them and their cause.

Spirit: You have done a lot of concerts for the peace movement, but why was it just as important for you to also support Vietnam veterans?

McDonald: I wanted to support them because I felt they were justified. Everything about them was important to know, and the public needed to know their stories. It was very important. It involved the nation and the world — everything.

But the important thing to me — and for your question — is that Jack McCloskey and I were standing on the steps of the Veterans Memorial Building, and as he was talking about a benefit coming up, he said, “Joe, would you like to play for this?” Then he said to me, “Joe, you’re a veteran too.”

And that blew my mind. It blew my mind! I internalized it at that moment, and I’m feeling you, the next six months of my life were like an acid trip. Unbelievable.

And I realized that I was guilty, and that if I had been sent to Vietnam, I would have killed people. I’m not a pacifist and what I did was part of a machine. I was guilty of that.

Spirit: Are you saying you were guilty of being part of the military machine?

McDonald: Yes. I was part of the military machine. And I was a veteran. And I had feelings about being a veteran. I had feelings about how I was treated by the civilian population. I had feelings about my parents never talking to me about my military experience. I had feelings about the left wing using me as an entertainer to draw people to their cause. I had many, many, many internalized emotional feelings.

Spirit: Is that because you now real-
Interview with Country Joe McDonald from page 10

ized that veteran’s issues were not just about “them” but about “you” as well?

McDonald: Well, yeah, in a way, but they were helping themselves anyway. So I just joined the group that had been moving the wagon. We’d sit around and talk. We told jokes and had fun together. It was a frater-
nal organization and I watched it actually evolve and go through different changes.

Spirit: You also toured and did benefits for veterans groups, didn’t you?

McDonald: I went around and I played for GI coffeehouses, and I played for Vietnam veterans’ demonstrations. I played for the different organizations: the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, and Vietnam Veterans of America. I helped do things at the Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and for women who were Vietnam veterans.

Spirit: What events at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington?

McDonald: In 1981 I had a benefit concert in Washington, D.C., and it was a big show with lots of times as part of their ceremonies. I got to know Jan Scruggs, the guy who built the memorial. He became a close friend of mine and we had some nice adventures together. I met Dr. Arthur Blank, the head of the V.A. outreach program. He just let me stay at his house when he was coming to Washington, D.C. I mean, I was embraced by these people.

[Editor: Dr. Arthur Blank, the director of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Center, ran the V.A., was very involved in the treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder among Vietnam veterans.]

Spirit: Why did veterans groups even want you and your music? You were a rebellious song as ‘Fixin’ to Die Rag’?

McDonald: It became loved not only by military personnel who were against the war, but military personnel who were for the war. As a matter of fact, the song became something that was taught in Marine boot camp in San Diego. I know that for a fact, I was told by a friend that he’d rented a record for ‘Fixin’ to Die Rag’ by the left wing and by people who like music, the rock and roll community. It was something that I did. But with the veterans, it was something that I am.

So here’s a little story about that. There’s a guy, Phil Butler, and he was in the Hanoi Hilton, the atrocity prison camp in Vietnam that held pilots who were cap-
tured. John McCain was held in the Hanoi Hilton, and Phil Butler was there for seven years. He became a member of Vietnam Veterans of America and I was playing in San Francisco doing these events, just singing some songs there.

Phil Butler came up to me. I almost start crying just thinking about it, because he said to me, ‘Country Joe, you play American music in the compound in Hanoi Hilton to demoralize us.’ Hanoi Hannah would play music to demoralize Americans in the compound, the prisoners of war.

“War Way War” is a collaboration between Robert W. Service and Joe McDonald.

Spirit: Why would the music demoral-
ize them? By making them miss home?

McDonald: Yes, miss home miss home and think about home. But Phil said, “When they would play ‘Fixin’ to Die Rag,’ it would boost our morale and make us feel good.” Then he said, “I never dreamed I would live to hear you sing it in person.” We both started crying and hugging each other. It was like, “Oh, my God…”

I met a guy who told me his buddy died in his arms in Vietnam from his wounds and the last words from his lips were, “Whoopee, we’re all gonna die.”

This is beyond the Billboard chart of top 10 hits. It’s something really special and it’s very meaningful to me. And I was delighted to find that out, because I never would have found it if it hadn’t been Jack McCloskey telling me about being a veteran, and my getting to know all these guys and doing this stuff with them.

Spirit: I saw in the news that you per-
formed at the 20th-anniversary of the Berkeley Vietnam War Memorial in November. How did you get involved?

McDonald: Recently, I worked to help phil-anthropist Jack McCloskey get the City of Berkeley at the Veterans Memorial Building. I’ve done quite a few programs like that. We hadn’t had a Veteran’s Day event in Berkeley for some years, and it occurred to me that I could help make this happen. I was the person who stirred the pot and got things going, along with from the Shirley Dean and council people and Disabled American Veterans. It was a nice hometown Veteran’s Day ceremony. I sang “Fixin’ to Die Rag.”

Spirit: You’ve done benefits for veteran’s groups all over the country.

McDonald: Yeah, I’ve done quite a few events for veterans — left-wing, right-wing, middle-wing, Navy, Army, women and men.

Spirit: You’ve also written far more songs about war than most people realize. Every song on “Vietnam Experience” speaks out against the war. What does it give voice to the soldiers in the field. What led you to make that album?

McDonald: I realized at some point I could make a whole album of these songs, I had done thematic albums like Thinking of Woody Guthrie and War War War, but it occurred to me I could do the Vietnam Experience album.

The last song of that album was “Welcome Home.” A Navy vet friend of mine who was working on a documentary film of a large ticket-poor parade to welcome home Vietnam veterans. The film was called “Welcome Home,” and he asked me to write the title song.

I said I’d try, and then I realized that in order to write that song, I had to check my attitude and put it aside.

Spirit: What attitude did you have to set
aside?

McDonald: My attitude of: “Fuck those people, they did this to me. They’re wrong, and these are the right people.”

These are the good guys and these are the bad guys. And that’s how I could write, “Some refused to go and some went away to fight. Everyone wants to know who was wrong and who was right. But the war is over and we may never agree. In time to put the deaths to rest and get together and say, Welcome home?”

So I had to put my attitude on hold and write an uplifting song. A friend of mine who is a pro-war, Vietnam War nurse said that “Welcome Home” was her favorite song. She loved that song because there’s no finger-pointing. It’s a morale-boosting welcome home song for people that weren’t welcomed home.

It was a pleasure to be a part of that. I had to internalize that and I had to feel it, I had to feel that I was resigning from this argument: Is war right? Is war wrong? Just as a musician and a Navy veteran, I don’t know who is responsible for war. It’s occurred to me many, many times to won-
time. And when you don’t have the collective conscious-
ness of the people of America say, “No war. We’re going to dismantle this machine.” I remember talking to my mother about this. She’s Jewish and she hated the Vietnam War. She said the Vietnam veterans were baby killers, you know.

When I traveled through Germany, I asked my audiences in Germany at every gig, “Anybody here have family members in the military?” Not a person raised their hand. “Anybody have grandparents who were in the military?” Not a person raised their hand. “Anybody here have family members in the military?” Not a person raised their hand. Then I realized that these Nazis were the heros and their families were dealing with the stigmatiza-
tion — like Vietnam veterans are doing. Who is to blame for that?

Spirit: If the soldiers are not to blame, for who is to blame?

McDonald: Who is to blame? Well, like I said in “Fixin’ to Die Rag,” the political leaders and the millionaires and the military leaders and the governments that make the world go round. The Pol Pots, the Lyndon Johnson.

Spirit: And, in the case of Germany, the Hitler.

McDonald: The Hitlers. And the peo-
paint, support. Without his support, I wouldn’t be here. But I’d like to make a little compari-

son here. What if you’re working for the U.S. Post Office? That’s a government job, right? And no matter what happens at work and both your legs are blown off? What compensation should you get from the post office?

But what if you’re in war, working for the government, and your legs are blown off? What compensation should you get from the government? I think that everybody sort of agrees that the post office worker should get more than the person in the military. But I don’t know if that is right. I don’t know how much more stuff out there for you to think about.

With my union upbringing and my left-
ist upbringing, let’s say you’re working in the Teamsters union and a Caterpillar tractor runs over your legs. What compen-
sation should you get from that? And you are in the union. And you’re in the military?

But let’s say that you’re in the military and you have that same job — they have people who drive Caterpillar tractors — and you say, “I was working for the military and I was doing something that kind of compensation should you get from that? And who is going to speak out in your defense? John Cronin or John C. Reilly? Where is your union? A military tribunal? What the fuck. You’re going to go to the VA and get in line. Get in line, man. The government is not on your side.

Spirit: Many veterans had to fight for basic medical care when they returned home. I did an article on the hospice movement and interviewed a Vietnam vet-

eran who survived the effects of Hodgkin’s disease from Agent Orange.

McDonald: The Agent Orange story is so sad and so tragic. The Agent Orange problems in Vietnam from this defoliant are generational, and from an ecological point of view, many planetary problems are ecologically related. Where the Agent Orange wasn’t recognized as being harmful, and it’s been a struggle. But it just kills you and it causes birth defects in the second and third generation. It’s a terrible thing. Some of this stuff is so hard to look at.

[Editor: Agent Orange is made up of two herbicides, 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T. The 2,4,5-T was contaminated with dioxin, described as “perhaps the most toxic molec-
ule ever synthesized by man” and a cause of cancer, Hodgkin’s lymphoma and leukemia, even in the children of those exposed to Agent Orange.]

Spirit: You recorded two songs about Agent Orange, and also took part in a film documentary about Agent Orange.

McDonald: Yeah, two documentaries. The song, “Vietnam Experience” was adapted into a music video by Green Mountain Films, which came out of an underground news service in New England. I think it is really powerful.

[Editor: The film was called “Vietnam Experience” a gripping mix of wartime and post-war film footage without commentary, except for antiwar songs by Country Joe and the Ikies, and the result is a harrowing and more eloquent than all the Hollywood movies on the subject.”]

Spirit: Did the second film focus specific-
ally on the horror of Agent Orange?

McDonald: Yes, Green Mountain Post Films made an Agent Orange film called “The Secret Agent.” It was rather shock-

See Interview with Country Joe page 12

April 2016 STREET SPIRIT 11
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and I wondered if she had PTSD. So I went to the library and looked up two books: Cecil Woodham-Smith’s definitive biography, titled Florence Nightingale, and Sir Edward Cook’s two-volume biography, Florence Nightingale. I read them, and it was so fascinating. I knew nothing about the Victorian era, and the Crimean War, which was so similar to the Vietnam War, was a debacle. Everything went wrong in that war.

I learned that Nightingale’s struggle as a woman against a patriarchy that chose to ignore her, and the way she was treated; and her companion- ship with the sick. When she fought for the Sisters of Mercy, the Catholic sisters she worked with. It was just so fascinating and incredible, and I started collecting stuff about her life. I was just captivated by it.

I amassed quite a big archive about her, and I just recently donated it to the UCSF Nursing School. It occurred to me that I should put together a tribute to Florence Nightingale like I did with the Woody Guthrie tribute. I interviewed her and I described how Florence Nightingale came to life and refused to talk to anyone for her service. She lived reclusively. I studied the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, and one is isolation.

**Spirit:** You described Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in your song, “The Girl Next Door (Combat Nurse).” It’s a beautiful statement about the bravery and sacrifice of the nurses who served in the Vietnam War. Lynda Van Devanter the inspiration?

McDonald: Yeah. The girl next door will never be the same! You’ll go off to college and you’ll come back home, and you used to be fun, and now you’re no fun anymore.

**Spirit:** Why do you think they had that long-lasting sadness and anger? Why do they find closure so hard?

McDonald: I don’t know what happens when you lose a sibling. What I’m saying about these experiences is that you think — in the fantasy that you have of your life — that you’ll go and have an experience and then come back home. You’ll go off to college, you’ll come back home, and you’ll just put it in the plethora of experiences that you have. But these experiences in war change the trajectory of your life. You come back home, and you used to be fun, and now you’re no fun anymore.

**Spirit:** Because you’ve seen too much and been blasted with traumatic experiences that don’t fit in. You can’t get past them.

McDonald: Yes. The problem is the loathing that they experience. Now, thanks to Vietnam veterans collectively, he is the peer-group sharing, the telling of the only thing that enables you to cope with your experience. But you never get over your experience. Never. Never.

**Spirit:** You say your song says that the nurse is everybody’s savior but her own. Then it asks, “Who will save her now?”

McDonald: Yes, who will save her?

**Spirit:** Well, who will save her?

McDonald: That’s the question. I don’t know. I’m sort of the Greek chorus. I just ask these questions, and give a voice to people who don’t have a voice. That’s one of the things I do in that song.

**Spirit:** Did you feel that Van Dauter and Florence Nightingale had experienced so much death and destruction, that they were the same in their own form of post-traumatic stress as a combat soldier?

McDonald: Absolutely! Absolutely! Or the stress of a rape victim. Or any imaginable, sudden trauma, don’t get over it being raped.

**Spirit:** Did Van Dauter write a book about her experiences in Vietnam?

McDonald: Yeah. Home Before Morning. It’s her autobiography. Great book. The first woman to write about this — and there haven’t been a lot. “China Beach,” the TV show, was based on her book and her experiences in Vietnam.

---

**Interview with Country Joe McDonald**

from page 11

_Street Spirit_ April 2016

I wrote the music for the film. As part of the film’s score, I recorded Muriel Hurley, who had been a combat nurse in Vietnam, in Berkeley about the problems of military. I promised Lynda that I would look up nursing and the article mentioned her. I just didn’t realize the magnitude of it. I’ve actually heard that air-spraying Agent Orange for so many miles and the documentary, _Visions of War, Dreams of Peace_, is a tribute to anyone who thinks that they know what war is. Even after her death, she can continue to open your mind about military women speaking out. The story of Florence Nightingale is such a strong witness to the realities of war from the female perspective.

McDonald: My wife Kathy is a labor and delivery nurse and midwife. My niece is a nurse in San Francisco. My daughter is a nurse practitioner from Kaiser after 36 years. And, of course, my mother was named Florence. Another coincidence in my life. When she went off to war, she refused to stop it, and she was working towards that end. She was a fighter, a friend and comrade and felt so sorry for her daughter and husband.

**Spirit:** Everything you have learned from Lynda Van Devanter? Florence Nightingale must have even more impact considering how many members of your generation benefited.

McDonald: When I was studying about Florence Nightingale, I found out that there were families that owned England at that time. Her family had two homes. They had a country home and their main home. In their main home, they had 70 gardens. Florence was a part of England and her whole life. She was part of the upper class. Her family was part of the 20,000 families that owned England at that time.

**Spirit:** So she could have lived in luxuries for war? Did she have any training or did she have to study nursing in Germany at the age of 31? It was the first time in her life that she had ever dressed herself, and she owned her own home. And she went from that into the hell of the Crimean War with 2,000 deaths in her first year, and dysentery, bleeding, vomiting, moaning and groaning. Then she went on after to that sanity of the country of India. Her story is incredible. And the other
Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 12

ting that fascinated me is how ignored Nightingale today — except me. She's almost forgotten now, even though her name is still known. But she was, and is, misunderstood.

Spirit: In your Tribute to Florence Nightingale, you described her nursing 2,000 dying soldiers in the Crimean War. She called them “living skeletons, desoured by vermin.” She says these amazing words: “I stand at the altar of the murdered men” and while I live I fight their cause.”

McDonald: Right! There hasn’t even been a realistic movie made about her. She’s almost forgotten now, even though her name is still known. She was, and is, misunderstood.

Spirit: What did it mean to her to write those words over and over?

McDonald: It meant that she wanted to forget it, but she could never forget it. And that drove her on, that she could never forget the experience of war.

Spirit: On one hand, it was a sacred trust for Nightingale to never forget the soldier’s war. On the other hand, it’s like she would always be haunted and traumatized by their deaths.

McDonald: She was haunted! She was haunted! Like everybody is haunted when they’re the trauma victims of war. And everybody has his or her own capacity. She could never forget that. She could never forget that she was haunted! She was haunted! Like everybody is haunted when they’re the trauma victims of war. And everybody has his or her own capacity. She could never forget that. She could never forget that. She could never forget that.

Spirit: Is there anything that fascinated you about Nightingale?

McDonald: Isn’t that beautiful? Isn’t that gorgeous?

Spirit: It’s really electrifying. And you recite those words with so much urgency. Why did you want to make those words come alive for a modern audience?

McDonald: Oh, I just love it! Because in the first place what you just read, she gives you her credentials. She tells you that she personally knows what she is talking about. She had this personal experience of war that caused a change in her life and caused her to be transformed. She said, “I stand at the altar of the murdered men.” I love the word “murdered.” That’s a first. They weren’t served their country. They were murdered. They were murdered. They were murdered not by war, but by war. They were murdered by their government. They were murdered. And as long as I live, she said, I’ll champion their cause. She has a voice of her own. And she did it. She did it! For the rest of her life, she did it!

Spirit: Another highly moving moment in your tribute is when she said, “I will never forget.” She emphasized the importance of those words.

McDonald: Yeah, that’s the thing that really hits me. It’s just like you give me, like the other Vietnam War nurses. They also found out: “I can never forget.” Those are Florence Nightingale’s own words. “I can never forget!” And she wrote it on pieces of paper for the rest of her life. “I can never forget.” She took extensive notes, and wrote constantly, just volumes and volumes of stuff. And she was always writing: “I can never forget.”

Spirit: What did it mean to her to write those words over and over and over?

McDonald: It means that she wants to forget it, but she can never forget it. And that drove her on, that she could never forget the experience of war.

Spirit: On one hand, it was a sacred trust for Nightingale to never forget the soldier’s war. On the other hand, it’s like she would always be haunted and traumatized by their deaths.

McDonald: She was haunted! She was haunted! Like everybody is haunted when they’re the trauma victims of war. And everybody has his or her own capacity. She could never forget that. She could never forget that.

Spirit: When you were talking about what a veteran has gone through. As a matter of fact, Florence Nightingale was that in an age of war, she carried that nervous condition that drove her on, that she could never forget it, but she can never forget it. And I think that’s one of the things that surrounds us. What language do we use to talk about what a veteran has gone through.

McDonald: Right! There hasn’t even been a realistic movie made about her. She was, and is, misunderstood.

Spirit: And when you were talking about that common language, I was thinking of John Lennon’s first line in “I Am the Walrus”: “I’m the walrus and you’re the mermaid and you and me and we are all together.”

McDonald: Yeah! Yeah. Yeah.

Spirit: So I just solved it. You just need to listen to the Beatles more often. [both laugh] Speaking of songs, “Lady with the Lamp” is such a beautiful song about Florence Nightingale. You describe how she nurses soldiers dying thousands of miles away from home. You imagine her, stay with him to the end. You know she understands, she’s the soldier’s friend.

McDonald: Yes, that’s what they say. They’re the soldier’s friend. The soldiers hadn’t a friend before. As a matter of fact, Florence Nightingale established that the whole concept of the hospital ship was been developed. It’s a whole new idea.

Spirit: That was the only way they knew how to deal with the war. McDonald: McDonald: See, that’s one of the terrible things about war. You can become insane in action or lose the whole thing of keeping records, which is a grimy task.

Spirit: Before that, people would often just disappear into death, and their families would never know what had happened.

McDonald: Yeah, if you were just a working-class grunt in the army, nobody knew what happened to you. Nobody ever knew what hapen. You were a soldier. You were a grunt. Nobody even knew if you were alive or dead. Officers, it was different. But the lower classes are the nameless ones.

So back then, if you wanted to find out what happened to you, you had to do it one by one, nobody’s keeping their records. But Florence Nightingale kept records, and that’s one reason they called her “the soul of

Florencia Nightingale Commemorative Statue, London Road, Derby.

Florencia Nightingale was that in an age of war, she carried that nervous condition that drove her on, that she could never forget it, but she can never forget it. And I think that’s one of the things that surrounds us. What language do we use to talk about what a veteran has gone through.

There are a lot of theories about it. One is that she suffered from brucellosis (or Crimean fever), and maybe she did. Maybe she had lead poisoning or mercury poisoning. But part of the mix, the gestalt that made up Florence Nightingale, was her war experiences.

The other fascinating thing about Florence Nightingale was that in an age when women did not have careers, she chose to have a career. She chose to never get married. She decided she didn’t want to do that. She was going to have a career.

Spirit: In many ways, she was a woman who opened doors.

McDonald: That’s right. She walked that road. She broke those doors down. She is very interesting.

Spirit: The thread that runs through nearly everything you’ve said in this interview is the terrible damage caused by war — combat nurses who can never forget, veterans who go on suffering long after the war is over, families who were blown apart just as much as their soldier sons were blown apart. What does all this have to say to governmental leaders who wage wars that will cause permanent damage and suffering to countless people?

McDonald: I love Kurt Vonnegut, and he wrote a book called The Sirens of Titan. It’s a really great book. I’ve read it so many times. He talks about the Trafalgaradions who would think in the form of a cloud above their planet. A cloud would form above their planet and all their consciousnesses would merge into one and they would make decisions.

[Editor: The Trafalgaradions also appear in Sluggersheythe-Five where Vonnegut writes: “All moments, past, present and future, always have existed, always will exist. The Trafalgaradions can look at all the different moments just the way we can look at a stretch of the Rocky Mountains, for instance. They can see how permanent all the moments are, and they can look at any moment that interests them.”

We don’t have such a thing. So in making decisions about war, we have governmental bodies. We have the rule of law. We have customs and ethnicities and grudges that go back for generations that prevent us from merging our consciousness together. We do have a collective consciousness of being a planet now, because we’ve seen pictures taken from outer space that show we are a planet, and we are on a sphere, and we are a species on this planet of sapiens beings.

But we haven’t developed the ability to communicate collectively. So without that, we’re at a loss. We’re at a loss and we don’t know what to do. How do we decide these great questions of war and peace? What can we do? I don’t know.

In my own consciousness, there are the civilians, and then there are the veterans; there are the anti-war people and the pro-war people. What we need is a dialogue, but how do we have a dialogue? How do we have a collective dialogue with seven billion people? Seven billion people! But we need a dialogue. Don’t we need a dialogue to decide these things?

Albert Einstein looked to international law and the abolition of war crimes and the strengthening of the United Nations. He called for every individual to refuse to participate in war, and called for governments to abolish weapons of mass destruction.

McDonald: Yeah. If you were just a working-class grunt in the army, nobody knew what happened to you. Nobody ever knew if you were alive or dead. Officers, it was different. But the lower classes are the nameless ones.

So back then, if you wanted to find out what happened to you, you had to do it one by one, nobody’s keeping their records. But Florence Nightingale kept records, and that’s one reason they called her “the soul of...
Interview with Country Joe McDonald

from page 13

No one had done that before. Then she noted the psychological and emotional toll on the families of deceased service members and decided to do something about it.

On her own dime, she built little cafes and got people to give lessons to the soldiers. When you’re saying that to them to write home. And on her own, she developed a system so that they could send money home to their families. In that sense, she was clearly a pioneer with reading rooms, educational courses and savings plans.

She lived for over 150 years. And today we live in a world of warrior wor-

ship. We don’t hate and disrespect sol-
diers any more, but we place them on a pedestal, if you will. I think.

So just I think it is important to examine war from every angle possible.

And I do believe that war is caused by children, not soldiers. So anything we can do to see war from the point of view of sol-
diers is important. Because after all, they do not exist alone as robots or projections of our minds. They are our family members and when they feel something, we feel it.

When they dysfunction, we dysfunction.

Nightingale was not just a nurse, only in medical and spiritual terms. I think that if we open up to see it, we have no choice but to stop doing it or die. Thanks for getting me to think about all of this. It is a challenge to put into words.

I, of course, mostly put things into song.

Country Joe and the Fish

Spirit: Country Joe and the Fish were deeply involved in the counterculture of the Bay Area. That period is now seen in almost mythic terms as a utopian and revo-

lutionary time. When is it likely to be part of the so-called Aquarian Age?

McDonald: It was important for me to be part of the Aquarian Age. Up until then, I had felt I had only felt a part of something like the Aquarian Age.

We were collectively something. I don’t know if it was almost religious terms, but in emotional and spiritual terms. I think that if we open up to see it, we have no choice but to stop doing it or die. Thanks for getting me to think about all of this. It is a challenge to put into words.

Country Joe and the Fish were deeply involved in the counterculture of the Bay Area. That period is now seen in almost mythic terms as a utopian and revolu-
tionary time. When is it likely to be part of the so-called Aquarian Age?

McDonald: It was important for me to be part of the Aquarian Age. Up until then, I had felt I had only felt a part of something like the Aquarian Age.

We were collectively something. I don’t know if it was almost religious terms, but in emotional and spiritual terms. I think that if we open up to see it, we have no choice but to stop doing it or die. Thanks for getting me to think about all of this. It is a challenge to put into words.

Everybody agreed on the same premise: peace and love. It was a moment of peace and love. And it really happened.

I watched pretty much the whole show and I had a good time. You know, I enjoyed being part of the Aquarian Age and those incredible moments of musical history when just all that stuff was happening — like the best potluck you’ve ever attended in your life. It was unbelievable.

I used to stand in front, next to the stage, at Jerry Garcia’s feet, watching him play the guitar. And I had a good time. It was a very good. He had an astral projection of his music, and saving plans.

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.

Spirit: You had good timing in moving to Berkeley in 1965 when the whole counterculture was about to take off.

McDonald: Being a hippie was something that I had dreamed of, because it was something I could turn myself into. I had tried a lot of things before which were not very satisfying. And being a hippie was easy to do, because you could just wear long hair and clothes with different political beliefs. I hadn’t found that free-
dom before in all the traditional things I had explored. I felt the music and the lifestyle of the school and the left-wing politics from my family.

Spirit: What was it like for Country Joe and the Fish to play at the Fillmore Auditorium and the Avalon Ballroom in the glory days of psychedelic music?

McDonald: We played a lot at the Fillmore and the Avalon starting in 1967. People would do these crazy psychedelic shows.

There would be these new things, playing two sets each. So it was six sets of music during the night. And there was just a lot of music, a lot of other stuff in my life. It was pure, unadul-
terated fun.
Interview with Country Joe McDonald
from page 14

Benno Friedman photo

audience and they were just all gagga over her. It was a great show.

We had been boyfriend-girlfriend for two or three months in the Haight Ashbury before Monterey. We were breaking up at the time of Monterey. Before Monterey happened, I was there when Chet Helms introduced her at the Avalon Ballroom in San Francisco when she first hooked up with Big Brother and the Holding Company. I loved her with Big Brother and the Holding Company. I thought that was a great rock and roll band.

Spirit: I did too. Some critics started putting them down as excessive, and they were underrated, but I thought Big Brother was a great band and worked well with Janis. You wrote a moving song called "Janis." How did that song come about?

McDonald: When I broke up with Janis, she said, "Would you write a song for me before you get too far away from me?" So I was up in Vancouver and I played a little thing on my guitar and I quickly wrote the lyrics and the song, "Janis." I liked the song.

Spirit: It's a pretty really song. You wanted to give "Janis" a life on waves of electrical sound and flashing light she came.

McDonald: Yeah, people really liked the song. And I do too. I think it's really nice.

Spirit: What was Janis like in person?

McDonald: Well, Janis was really obsessed with turning herself into Janis Joplin and she was very aggressive. She wanted to be Otis Redding. She had heard Otis and she really loved Otis Redding and she wanted to be Otis Redding. I mean, she really was. She was kind of an ordinary, down-home girl, you know, and she was very, very smart. Very aggressive and didn't want anything to do with politics. So she was, "I don't need no fucking-body telling me nothing, man."

Spirit: Speaking of historic festivals, there's that amazing moment at Woodstock when you were able to get hundreds of thousands to join you in singing to stop the Vietnam War. How did you end up all alone on the Woodstock stage singing to the Fish, singing to that massive audience?

McDonald: By the time Country Joe and the Fish came to Woodstock, the band was pretty much falling apart. Three of the original members were gone and we had new members. Chicken Hirsh, our drummer, had just quit the band abruptly, less than two months before that. I was really not liking the band anymore.

The magic that we had in the original arrangements, the complicated, wonder-fal, psychedelic songs that we were playing on the first album — could not even be played by this new band. We were making money, but it was the trail of a road band going out and playing gigs. It felt really estranged from the band.

But I have always loved playing out-door shows and I loved these festivals. We had played the Monterey Festival and I loved watching all the other bands because I just love that type of music.

So I went to Woodstock on Thursday without the band. The band came on Friday. I went out to the stage to see what was going on and I was kind of bored. I was watching the production get going before the bands come and then the bands setting up and playing. I love the whole gestalt of a rock show. On the second day, I was there early when Santana was supposed to go on. I was hanging around the stage just digging the scene, and Santana couldn't get through because of the traffic.

So Bill Belmont, the guy who was our road manager, was kind of moonlighting on the production staff of Woodstock, with John Morris who was the production coordinator. They were upset because they couldn't put Santana on as the next act. So I was sitting on the stage and John and Bill came over and said, "How would you like to start your solo career?" I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" They told me, "Just go out and play some stuff until Santana gets here."

I didn't really want to do it, so I told them I didn't have a guitar. They went and found a cheap, really great Yamaha guitar, a Yamaha FG 150, and they gave it to me. I was looking for excuses then, so I said, "I don't have a guitar strap." So Bill Belmont cut a piece of rope off the Rigante and they tied it to the guitar and they pushed me out on stage.

I didn't know what the hell to do, so I sang a couple country-western songs from my repertoire, and nobody in the audience was paying any attention to me.

Spirit: What was it like to be suddenly and unexpectedly put out on stage before hundreds of thousands of people?

McDonald: You know, I've always felt more comfortable on stage than off stage, so I was used to it and I was pretty relaxed about it. But my mind was blown when I came there on Friday and walked up on stage and saw the audience. That was incredible. It was so exciting.

It was so huge. But when I sang, no one was paying any attention to me at all. It was like a giant family picnic out there. But I decided to do the "Fish Cheer" and "Fixin' to Die Rag" and I started feeling a little bit excited about it.

Country Joe McDonald sings “Fixin’ to Die” at Woodstock. Benno Friedman photo

Spirit: A little excited? You yelled at everyone at Woodstock to start singing against the war, and all of a sudden hundreds of thousands of people exploded into a massive antwar outcry.

McDonald: I went up to the microphone and I just yelled, "Give me an F!" And they all stopped talking to each other and looked at me and yelled, "F!" And I thought, "Oh boy, here we go."

So I got pretty brave because they did the whole Fish Cheer with me, and then I was singing the song, "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag." I could see that the crowd seemed to be having a good time and they started to stand up, so I got really brave. I started haranguing them to sing louder, because if you want to stop the war you have to sing louder than that.

I went on and finished the song and they were all standing up and jumping up and down — and there you go. But I didn't know they were making a movie of it. I didn't even notice that.

Spirit: What did you think the first time you watched the movie and see "Fixin' to Die Rag" with the bopping ball to the lyrics and a huge crowd singing and cheering your unit-war message?

McDonald: Well, I was delighted. You know, Michael Wadleigh, the director, had drawn upon documentary film crews to put together his film crew to shoot Woodstock in 16 millimeter film. All of those crews were people who had been working on sociopolitical documentaries up to the time of Woodstock, and Michael himself had roots in sociopolitical documentaries and social movements in America.

So he really jumped into putting in "Fixin’ to Die Rag" as being a sociopolitical statement — a contemporary statement about the Vietnam War, because generally speaking, no one was making a political statement in the film. Joan Baez talked about her husband being in jail as a draft resister, and the Richie Havens song "Freedom" seems to have overtone of being political, but really nobody was making a political statement.

So Michael Wadleigh really liked that song, and he called me about three months after the festival to go down to L.A. We sat in the projection room together, just me and him, and he showed me what you see in the Woodstock film of me singing with the bouncing ball.

I couldn't believe it. It was really cool. He said, "How do you feel, "Whoo, that's great." I had no idea it would change my life.

Spirit: How did it change your life?

McDonald: When I walked off stage, John Morris said into the microphone, "That was Country Joe McDonald." So it established me as Country Joe McDonald and my identity of being a political statement against the Vietnam War. It allowed me to go on and have a solo career, and travel all over the world and make records and have bands.

It also enabled me to be somebody Vietnam veterans could look to, and in writing that song, to cope and deal with the insanity of the Vietnam War. Because the song does not say anything bad about soldiers. It just makes a statement about the war and the social and political roots of the war and how it came to be.

Just recently, I got asked by Bob Santelli, who is the executive director of the Grammy Museum in L.A., and also worked at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, to be a particip-ant at a symposium on the Vietnam War in Austin, Texas. [Editor: The Vietnam War Summit will be held April 26-28 at the LBJ Presidential Library.]

The same session called “One, Two, Three: What Are We Fighting For? The soundtrack of the Vietnam War, in country and at home.” I will be there, being inter-viewed by Bob Santelli and singing some songs. I never dreamed that would happen.

Spirit: Singing those words — “one, two, three, what are we fighting for?” — took you from a street corner in Berkeley to Woodstock and now, all the way to the Vietnam War summit at the LBJ Library.

McDonald: Well, especially because in 1965, when we made that little EP, that 7 inch record in the jug-band style of music, it had "I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag" on it. But it also had another song called "Superbird," which was about Lyndon Baines Johnson.

I joked with Bob and I said maybe I'll sing "Superbird." I think he got a little bit nervous because it has that chorus: "We're going to send you back to Texas to work on your ranch."

All that never, never would have happened if it hadn't been for Woodstock. So there you go... *** *** ***

The second installment of the Street Spirit interview with Country Joe McDonald will appear in the June issue.
When Amir Soltani first moved onto a quiet street in Oakland, he noticed a parade of people on their way to the finish line. With college kids partying in the streets or peeing in the wrong place, the same solution—rigorous police enforcement—was not working. The intersection of lives, on track and off, weaves through our experience of the recyclers lives, making us inevitably feel like part of the fabric. We are the neighbors at times, depressed with communication between householders in Oakland, who together casual up the landscape of waste diverted from landfill by the dedication of the recyclers, and the church’s outreach helps former recyclers lives, making us feel as we are at a joyful family reunion of the film’s participants and crew. He wondered how a recycling facility works, and when it was over and the principals gathered for questions, he liked a broad shot of the sparkling view of West Oakland from the hills and then dialled it to the tender detail of the lives of recyclers themselves and Alliance Recycling’s dogged effort to continue its over 30 years of legal recycling operations for the area’s sake, the environment’s sake, and the sake of the hundreds who depend on recycling for income.

The filmmakers spent years on the story established with Dogtown Redemption’s main subjects, recyclers given intimate, respectful portraits. The despair of former Polkacide drummer Mary S. Lam, who turned to a love of her gravestones is given its pure gravity, and the spontaneous dance she does with a friend in the middle of the street, where she is victimised by an assault which left her in a coma before her death, is dedicated to her memory. Recycling bottles, cans, plastics and metal is not romanticized in the film, but it is easy to see the way it makes sense to someone who needs work and watches what Bay Area citizens throw away with out thinking. Toys, clothes, books, as well as recyclables are easy to find in Bay Area dumpsters and garbage bins. We may think of ourselves as green, but sometimes the East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse or Urban Ore option is apparently just too far to travel, and as more recycling centers close, people have to travel even farther through the streets. For people quick enough, strong enough, and smart enough, the Bay Area’s catastrophic amount of waste can be culled for real gold. The recyclers are occasionally accused of theft; PG&E pipe showed up one day at Alliance Recycling, bringing a wrath of police officers and a day without business. Alliance uses video cameras to cooperate with the police on potential theft issues. Recyclers are occasionally accused of peering in the wrong place, the same soluble problem any neighborhood encounters with college kids partying in the streets or Bay to Breakers runners cutting corners on their way to the finish line. The community of people that does this work is black, white, Asian, and Hispanic. It is young, old, addicted, healthy, as capable and as culpable as any of us are in any housed community. The intersection of lives, on track and off, weaves through our experience of the recyclers lives, making us inevitably feel part of the fabric. We are the recyclers at times, heroically ploughing the East Bay’s rough streets, diverting reusable materials from the waste stream. We are the neighbors at times, depressed by the daily sight of poverty.

The church’s outreach helps former recycler Landon Goodwin’s path to stabil- ity, marriage, and steady employment. Teachers at a martial arts dojo help recyc- ler Jason W. identify and affirm his own innate powers of balance and disci- pline without which, he stated, “I know I’d be dead by now.” An outreach group helps Miss Kay acquire the identification card she needs to apply for assistance, which she briefly suc- ceeds in doing before despair takes her back to the street, where she is victimised by an assault which left her in a coma before her death. The film is dedicated to her memory. Recycling bottles, cans, plastics and metal is not romanticized in the film, but it is easy to see the way it makes sense to someone who needs work and watches what Bay Area citizens throw away with out thinking. Toys, clothes, books, as well as recyclables are easy to find in Bay Area dumpsters and garbage bins. We may think of ourselves as green, but sometimes the East Bay Depot for Creative Reuse or Urban Ore option is apparently just too far to travel, and as more recycling centers close, people have to travel even farther through the streets. For people quick enough, strong enough, and smart enough, the Bay Area’s catastrophic amount of waste can be culled for real gold. The recyclers are occasionally accused of theft; PG&E pipe showed up one day at Alliance Recycling, bringing a wrath of police officers and a day without business. Alliance uses video cameras to cooperate with the police on potential theft issues. Recyclers are occasionally accused of peering in the wrong place, the same soluble problem any neighborhood encounters with college kids partying in the streets or Bay to Breakers runners cutting corners on their way to the finish line. But the neighborhood voice that has the Oakland City Council’s ear right now is pretty obviously objecting to the sight of poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk 15 miles a day redeeming materials no one else bothers with, just to make a difficult but independent living. The majority of any scavenger’s haul is bottles and cans — bottles and cans which the film depicts in noisy, seemingly endless cascading waterfalls of color. The careful nuance and artifice poured into the appealing, colorful design of each can by corporate marketing teams becomes a riotous patchwork once sorted and crushed together, a small ratio of East Bay waste diverted from landfill by the dedi- cation of street recyclers.

Former Congressional Representative Ron Dellums is featured in the film making the important connection to Oakland’s piv-otal role in World War II. Oakland was “Ellis Island West” for the black men and women who were crucial in building the ships, the businesses, and the community that helped win the war, a community which recycled as a matter of course. Even children at the time collected materials such as scrap metal, an activity considered a civic duty and an exercise in patriotism. When the government wanted workers for the shipyards of Richmond, it not only succeeded in creating one of the first instances of an integrated work force, both racially and by gender, it built housing. Not integrated housing, but more than 23,000 units of workforce housing in four years, including family housing, dorms for single men, and recreational facilities for children. This is something worth contemplating. It isn’t that the government, in state, federal, or municipal form, doesn’t know how to build housing for low-income working people. It’s that, right now, its ear is tuned in to developers’ needs and a few complaints from homeowners who object to the sound and sight of shopping carts rattling by.

Lena Rickles, the attorney for Alliance Recycling, says the business is slated to close this August, leaving hundreds of people who currently depend on recycling at risk of having no legal options for sur- vival. “Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk several miles to pan for their legal options for survival. ‘Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk 15 miles a day redeeming materials no one else bothers with, just to make a difficult but independent living. The majority of any scavenger’s haul is bottles and cans — bottles and cans which the film depicts in noisy, seemingly endless cascading waterfalls of color. The careful nuance and artifice poured into the appealing, colorful design of each can by corporate marketing teams becomes a riotous patchwork once sorted and crushed together, a small ratio of East Bay waste diverted from landfill by the dedi- cation of street recyclers.

Former Congressional Representative Ron Dellums is featured in the film making the important connection to Oakland’s piv-otal role in World War II. Oakland was “Ellis Island West” for the black men and women who were crucial in building the ships, the businesses, and the community that helped win the war, a community which recycled as a matter of course. Even children at the time collected materials such as scrap metal, an activity considered a civic duty and an exercise in patriotism. When the government wanted workers for the shipyards of Richmond, it not only succeeded in creating one of the first instances of an integrated work force, both racially and by gender, it built housing. Not integrated housing, but more than 23,000 units of workforce housing in four years, including family housing, dorms for single men, and recreational facilities for children. This is something worth contemplating. It isn’t that the government, in state, federal, or municipal form, doesn’t know how to build housing for low-income working people. It’s that, right now, its ear is tuned in to developers’ needs and a few complaints from homeowners who object to the sound and sight of shopping carts rattling by.

Lena Rickles, the attorney for Alliance Recycling, says the business is slated to close this August, leaving hundreds of people who currently depend on recycling at risk of having no legal options for sur- vival. “Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk several miles to pan for their legal options for survival. ‘Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk several miles to pan for their legal options for survival.

Lena Rickles, the attorney for Alliance Recycling, says the business is slated to close this August, leaving hundreds of people who currently depend on recycling at risk of having no legal options for sur- vival. “Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will- ingness to walk several miles to pan for their legal options for survival. ‘Neighbors did not want to look at poverty itself, even poverty with the will-