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From left, Colman McCarthy with Joan Baez, Celia Goldfarb (a then-student in McCarthy's class at senior in my class at Bethesda-Chevy High School in Maryland) and Eddie McCarthy (Colman's son), after one of Baez's 2016 shows in Washington



by Colman McCarthy

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For Joan Baez, her life in music began when as a 16-year-old ukulele-strumming 10th grader at Redlands High School in southern California, she took to singing songs for her classmates lounging on the grass during lunch hour. They applauded her renditions of popular songs like "Honey Love" and "Earth Angel," mixed in with imitations of Elvis Presley and Eartha Kitt.

The next day, the campus in-group invited her back. As recalled in her 1987 memoir, *And a Voice To Sing With*, "an exhibitionist impulse overcame me. ... I was a big hit. ... Before the week was out I had gone from being a gawky, self-conscious outsider to being something of a jesterlike star."

Sixty-two years after what first took hold of Joan's heart in Redlands came to an end July 28 at the Teatro Real concert hall in Madrid, Spain, with the encore song "No Nos Moveran" ("We Shall Not Be Moved"). It was the last stop in a Fare Thee Well Tour of 15 concerts in European countries that included Germany, Switzerland, France, Belgium, Italy and Spain.

Last spring saw goodbyes before coast to coast audiences in the United States, with nothing less than sell-out crowds. In Washington, it was an audience of 1,800 at the Warner Theatre savoring the set of 21 songs and three encores.

Since the late 1970s, I've had a loving friendship with Joan, one based on our shared commitments to nonviolence. At least two dozen times over the years it was her caring heart and deep generosity that moved her to give my students and me a large handful of tickets to her concerts in Washington and passes for after-show backstage get-togethers. Whether at the Kennedy Center or an open-air performance on the quad at American University, she relished meeting my students.

Every semester in the past 37 years, that I've been teaching peace studies to high school, college and law students, I devote ample amounts of time to read Baez's essays on pacifism and then dive into excerpts from her memoir, spicing it all with

the PBS American Masters documentary "How Sweet the Sound."

Part of my courses is asking students to keep journals, reflecting each week on what they might have intellectually or spiritually absorbed from the previous class's readings or films.

Here is a sampling of the literate and often touching ruminations from my fall 2018 "Peace is Possible" class of 50 students at Georgetown University.

Mallory Belknap:

I am speechless about the woman who is Joan Baez. Immediately after this class, I called my dad and asked if he knew who she was, and he was horrified that he raised a child who didn't know who she was and how she revolutionized music and social justice. He was disappointed in himself for not overtly instilling her spirit into my sister and me.

Joan Baez, during the time I read the essays and went to class, has become one of my heroes and inspirations. I see a lot of who I want to be in her, and I think the way in which she used her talents to elevate issues she cared about and beliefs she held is an amazing lesson for everyone, but it came to me at the right time.

I've been so consumed with not knowing how to express my passions in a way that no one else can in quite the same way I can, and it's really been weighing me down. There are so many things I want to stand for, and Georgetown has almost instilled in me, through the student body culture, that unless I am the best at something or have something brand new to offer, there's no point in raising my voice. While logically I know that's not how this whole life thing works, it's hard not to internalize the fact that so many of my peers are doing amazing (as society wants us to define it) things and discovering new ones, and feel like all I have is good intentions and a desire to tread as lightly as possible.

Seeing Joan use her musical talents to shed light on what she cared about really brought life to the fact that I have plenty of talents and maybe too many passions, and if I spent less time worrying about how to bring something new to the table and more time focusing on my talents and passions, I can make my mark in a way that absolutely no one else can.

What struck me most about Joan was her bravery. In the face of a society that did everything it could to put women and people like her into a little box, she persisted with everything she had despite the inevitable setbacks and obstacles. It is apparent through her actions that what she sang about was not merely a call for other people to change but truly what set her soul on fire and kept her going.

I admire Joan Baez more than I can even fathom right now after only learning about her in class, and I can only hope to embody even a fraction of her spirit, character and courage in my lifetime. In third grade, my school had a big project where everyone dressed up as their hero and presented information about them. Being the 9-year-old environmentalist that I was, I dressed up as Rachel Carson, my all-time biggest inspiration. While Rachel Carson will always be a hero and beacon of light for to me, were I to have that assignment now as a senior in college, I think I would dress up as Joan Baez, now someone who I hope I will hold as a hero for the rest of my life.

Related: Joan Baez earns her singular place in the peace movement

Kelly Amen:

This week's class was an eye-opener for me, as I had previously never heard of Joan Baez. After learning about her work and impact, I definitely felt a little embarrassed for not knowing Joan. I was inspired by her songs, activism and message. Something that I found compelling about Joan is that the one cause that she truly supported was nonviolent protest. From what I saw in the documentary, Joan was not particularly passionate about any one cause. Rather she supported nonviolent protest and social justice, and practiced those ideals through songs.

Though secondary to the central topic of the film, I found Joan's relationship to Bob Dylan to be very interesting. While she was initially attracted to his songwriting ability, I was proud of Joan for not letting her stardom overpower the message she wanted to deliver. I found this inspiring. Sometimes people, particularly women, let their relationships dictate their career and life path. Joan's ability to see past her relationship with Bob and see the bigger picture inspires me as a young woman who wants to be successful in my own profession and mission.

I am very grateful that this class has introduced me to her. Joan definitely serves as an inspiration to women and men and shows that achieving peace is possible through pacifism.

Carrie Bonfield:

Learning about the work of Joan Baez made me want to see more singers and celebrities follow her lead. By commenting on politics, injustices and current events in her songs, Baez is a voice for the voiceless. Her dedication to making her platform meaningful and to spread peace through her songs really touched me. I listen to songs now by my favorite singers and think to myself, "Why don't they write more meaningful lyrics?" [Their songs] are only meant to get stuck in someone's head for being catchy.

... Joan reinforced the notion that you can use your talents and passions for good in the world, no matter what they are. She is an inspiration for everyone to use their skills to make a difference in the world, whatever it may be. Joan Baez started the movement. Now it is time we all follow in her footsteps and continue her work.

Adrianna Soto-Wright:

I found the story of Joan Baez to be motivating in the way she demonstrated her beliefs and used her powerful singing and songwriting to instill change in the world. ... The documentary we watched explained how she was so moved by Martin Luther King's speeches. Joan and King had a mutual admiration for each other's nonviolent beliefs. It also explained how her brown skin exposed her to discrimination.

The news article you showed in class titled "Who's Afraid of Joan Baez?" highlighted her courage as a demonstrator. She was barred from a concert [for wounded veterans] at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Many saw her, along with other demonstrators for civil rights and nonviolent activists, as "unwanted folk." Her ability to ignore those who saw her actions as a hindrance reveals just how passionate she was for change.

Joan Baez's story has made me realize how crucial it is to stand up for what I believe in.

Madison Duval:

This week's class on Joan Baez was calming for me. Music has always been a method of de-stressing in my life. I've played piano since first grade and the trumpet since middle school. Folk music especially has played a large role in my life.

This is precisely why it was so amazing to learn about Joan Baez. She encompasses two of my favorite things: social justice and folk music. I had sadly never heard of her before today's class, which I see as a failure in the Virginia public school system. Why did I not learn of someone like Joan Baez, who accomplished so much professionally and in social justice? Her outreach and peace efforts were truly remarkable, and I find it sad that I had never learned of her.

I called home to see what my parents thought of Joan. They both raved about her soothing voice and impactful lyrics. My dad said that Joan was the artist that got him interested in folk music to begin with. I loved how my parents and I related over how much we value her voice. It's always amazing when an artist transcends generational lines and stays relevant with each new age of musical trends.

Joan's story gives me a lot of hope, because she was able to use her platform for immense and impactful good in society. I sometimes feel that in today's world, news outlets break story after story of celebrities going off the rails in terms of drug, alcohol or just bad attitudes. It was refreshing to see how Joan used her passion for music to promote good message and used her celebrity to affect change in the movement for peace.

Emma Turner:

Joan Baez's version of "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" has been played in my house more times than I can count. I knew about Joan Baez as a singer and musician but had never imagined the other life she led as an activist. I have not always been a fan of folk music. My parents used to play it around the house, and I found a lot of it sad or too severe. But after class today, I think I better understand the appeal of it. Joan Baez has the ability to reflect political movements, social activism, and the feelings of a generation with a few verses.

Her lyrics are beautiful, as in the song "There But For Fortune" where she sings "there but for fortune go you or I." Throughout so many great peace movements, music has played an important role, especially in the civil rights movements of the 1960s, where songs like "We Shall Overcome" were popularized. I didn't realize until class today the importance that Joan Baez played in that movement. Her help to Martin Luther King Jr. was crucial and she was pivotal in helping to integrate the first schools in the Deep South.

Joan is yet another example of courage that we have seen in this class. She was not concerned with what the critics thought of her. She was willing to do what she thought was right, always. What struck a personal chord with me was her difficulties with stage fright and finding her voice. I have often found it difficult to speak up, or I get nervous any time I have to be in front of people. Joan's example of finding your voice even amid fear and doubt is one that gives me hope that I can led my voice for a cause as worthy as the ones she fought for.

Lucky am I to be sharing time with students like these. Lucky, too, to have Joan's friendship. In the mid-1980s, I arranged for her to give a free outdoor concert on the quad at American University in Washington, and speak to my class after. She came to dinner to my home to meet my family, and then spent the night in our third-floor guest room.

Before leaving the next day to visit her son Gabriel in school in Boston, she spent much of the morning in the bedroom giving herself voice lessons by repeating over and over the musical scales. Hearing it brought to mind the singular first words of her memoir: "I was born gifted. I can speak of my gifts with little or no modesty, but with tremendous gratitude, precisely because they are gifts, and not things which I created, or actions about which I might be proud."

The gift was her voice which, along with her pacifism, she has shared for much of seven decades in a thousand or more global sites from bomb shelters in Hanoi to the White House.

What's next? There's the other gift: writing. It's been 32 years since the 1987 memoir. A literary encore is overdue. Way overdue.

[Colman McCarthy directs the Center for Teaching Peace in Washington. His forthcoming book is *Opening Minds, Stirring Hearts: The Peace Studies Class*.]

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