

## Just a Fool on a Stool

By Nolan Randall ([threebiker@gmail.com](mailto:threebiker@gmail.com))

Well, my fellow Redding alumnus, Dana Rippon, thought it would be interesting to hear how an introverted, quiet engineer ended up performing as a singer/songwriter in his retirement. So, here's my story.

Prior to retiring, I started taking guitar class at our community college. I always wanted to learn how to play guitar; but I didn't sing, nor did I want to. My mom sang in her church choir almost all her life, and she sang in the chorale group at our community college for many years. I figured I would learn how to play the guitar and could sit at home and play for my own enjoyment. I never thought that taking a guitar class would get me singing. From the first night of class, the teacher had us performing in groups, which included playing and singing. We did this every week. As the course went on, the groups got smaller until the night of our final exam, which was a solo performance.

### Gathering Inspiration and Confidence

Anyone who knows me knows I am a very quiet person. I would have never thought I would sing outside of my shower or singing along with the stack of John Prine CDs in my pickup. But I have always had a love for music — I suppose it's in my DNA. I loved to hear my mom sing, and I enjoyed listening to my dad's old country music records (Hank Williams and Lefty Frizzell for sure).



Attending Toastmasters, as suggested by a colleague, gave me the confidence to be more vocal when I needed to be; however, it never gave me the courage to sing in public. But after a few times singing in guitar class, I realized that maybe I could sing. Plus, a few people in the class said that my singing voice sounded good.

Our guitar teacher has a band. When he would play a gig and I was there, he would let me play and sing songs while they took their break. The first time I was very nervous, but I eventually started to become more comfortable performing. Later I started attending open mic events in town. I was very nervous again when I started doing that, but I got more comfortable over time.

Several people encouraged me to start performing gigs, including the owner of a local pub we frequented (which is where my first gig was). Our guitar teacher recommended I get a bass player to play with me and to sing harmony. I enlisted the help of another student in our class who had a bass, although he hadn't played it in many years. He

also said he could sing harmony, but that turned out to be not quite true. He does have a good singing voice, so that worked out well anyway.

## Getting Organized

My wife, Mary, who plays guitar a bit, wanted to play with us since she figured she would be tagging along with me anyway. She eventually took up the mandolin because we didn't really need two guitars in the band. That was the start of our little trio, with me on guitar and vocals, Mike on bass and vocals, and Mary on mandolin. We tried to come up with a name for our group, but to no



avail. One time at a gig, we were mentioning this to the audience; and I said I guess we're having an identity crisis ... and just like that, we had a name. I googled the name, and there were already a couple other bands with that name in the Midwest and in the South. So, officially, we are Nor Cal Identity Crisis, but just bill ourselves as Identity Crisis locally. We aren't seasoned musicians, but we have fun.

## Enjoying Musical Progress

The first song I wrote was a funny tune for guitar class about the songbook the teacher uses. After that, I wrote a song about an experience we had on a trip with our local Mini Cooper club. We drove to Kanab, Utah, and stayed a night in the town of Austin, Nevada, on Highway 50, in the middle of nowhere. I knew our experience was memorable enough that I had to capture it in a song (<https://youtu.be/OdMqCtBPdGM>).

After that, I ended up with ideas for other songs. While some have been easy to write, others are still waiting to be written. Most of the songs I've written to date are just silly/goofy. The last one I wrote was more of a serious song about a rodeo cowboy traveling from town to town to compete; not having a normal life; and just being broken, lonely, and tired. The idea for the song didn't come from me thinking, "Suppose I'll write a song about a rodeo cowboy."

Our band was practicing one night, and Mary wanted to practice a song that we do called Roseville Fair. But she couldn't remember the name and just said, "We should play that ... Rockville Roundup." We figured that there should be a song about the Rockville Roundup, wherever that was. It took over a year for it to finally come, but I like how it turned out. (<https://youtu.be/u4gMqUZdaYA>)(<https://youtu.be/u4gMqUZdaYA>).

Satisfaction from my engineering career was the feeling that I solved someone's problem or helped them in some other way. Satisfaction from music is very different. I can't imagine that I'm actually helping anyone or solving any problems; it's just a joy to make music. And if someone can be entertained by that, it's a big plus.

### **Continuing to Expand My Comfort Zone**

One weekend last November, I attended a songwriter retreat in Michigan. The first day of the retreat each person was given a song writing assignment in the form of a song prompt. On the morning of the last day, each of us performed the song we had written. Never in a million years would I have dreamed I'd be doing this.

To dive further into the right side of my brain, I've taken a drawing class and a painting class. Currently, I'm taking a digital art class. For the last few years, I've also been singing in the chorale group at the college where my mom had sung before she passed away in 2017. In February, we'll be singing Mozart's Requiem. I only wish she were still around so I could share this experience with her. She gave me so much.