

“THE BURN”

Anyone from the Class of '69 who participated in any of Herb Yenser's Vocal Musical Programs, Talent Shows or Musical Extravaganzas would undoubtedly remember well the term called, "The Burn". Its name accurately described the action verb that Herb was using with his eyes, frowning brow and short, choppy motions with his good arm to convey his total disapproval of some offense to proper classroom or artistic and professional behavior that a student had so rudely violated. It definitely was a non-verbal command by the master to the offending student to immediately cease the inappropriate behavior.

I had been a member of Hastings Junior High Choir and was quite pleased and honored when I became a member of the 1966-67 UAHS Senior Concert Choir as a sophomore. My sister had been the Head Accompanist during her senior year of 1964-65 and I was well acquainted with the demands and professional standards Herb Yenser expected each class year's choir to uphold. I then approached my artistic duties to perform in a professional manner, not only during performances but also during each and every rehearsal during the week.

As a Bass, I was given the seat assignment next to Jay Ball and Denny Dicke. They too had a serious approach to learning and performing their vocal musical skills. In fact we often felt a bit contemptuous of those, who on almost a daily basis, would invoke Yenser's wrath and be on the receiving end of "The Burn". We had a perfect record throughout our sophomore year of not being the kinds of students that had become outcasts because we had been given "The Burn". That is, until almost the very end of May, 1967 when we rehearsed a song called, "The Road Not Taken". It was the famous Robert Frost poem set to music by Randall Thompson.

As adults, the words reflect beautifully the sentiments and emotions we may encounter as we realize that life presents all of us with choices we may feel unready to make but know the path to challenges and rewards are often the road that has not yet been traveled. To the well meaning adult with caring sensibilities, there can only be one interpretation to the meaning of these descriptive words of this poem. However, if these very same words of wisdom are sung by fifteen-year-old adolescent males with raging hormones, then the interpretation can definitely take on new and totally different and suggestive meanings.

Such was the case with Jay Ball, Denny Dicke and myself as we rehearsed singing this beautiful poem set to music in late May, 1967 during choir rehearsal. As we sang, "Two roads diverged in a yellow wood" we all were thinking probably the same thing but continued singing in a professional manner. After we sang, "To where it bent in the undergrowth" then Jay made some sort of clever sexual innuendo that made us laugh out loud. Of course this alerted Herb Yenser that some un-named students were not taking their singing seriously and he promptly gave us disapproving glances, as if to say, "OK, Knock It Off". We all continued singing until we came to "Because it was grassy and wanted wear" and all three of us blurted out giggles that brought out "THE BURN" from a very disappointed and, starting to become very annoyed, Mr. Yenser. Then something happened that was totally unexpected...we all three got a case of the giggles-and we couldn't stop. The more Herb "Burned" us, the more we giggled. The more we giggled, the more Mr. Yenser "Burned" us. As the song continued, we tried to sing through the giggles until we came upon the words, "Had worn them really about the same" and we once again all three broke out into loud and uncontrollable giggles that just wouldn't stop. By now Herb was beyond angry and was into a temperamental fit with even his noodle arm also flailing all about until it looked like it would come out of it's socket. His hair was all fallen down into his eyes and his short and choppy arm movements were now so highly exaggerated to where he almost was about to fall off the podium as a result of his wild conducting. This, of course, made

us laugh until we were totally red in the face, feeling nauseous and then we still couldn't stop laughing. It continued like this throughout the rest of the song as we giggled, were burned and then Yenser would almost fall off the podium as we tried to stop our giggling and sing verses like "And both that morning equally lay" ...and..."Oh, I kept the first for another day". Unfortunately, we all continued giggling almost to the end as we sang the words, "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by". I'm sure there are many of you who may remember watching this spectacle but had no idea what it was all about.

I only experienced being on the receiving end of Herb Yenser's "The Burn" just that one time. I know there are many others that felt his "burning" disapproval during our time at either UAHS or at Jones.

What stories do you have?

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