

Big Brain Radio Show
10-15-05
Tribute to John Denver

(music)

D: Good morning. Welcome to the Big Brain Radio Show ... to our John Denver special. Hey, it's Saturday morning again ... We're ready to go. We've got a different show ... well, I guess we usually have a different show, don't we?

Z: This is a very special show. This is the John Denver tribute today. We are honored to bring remembrance to a very special man ... Some people know Henry John Duetschendorf.

D: Uh huh.

Z: Better known as John Denver.

D: John Denver. AKA John Denver. My name is Dr. David Stussy and I'm Dr. D.

Z: And I'm Dr. Zena Xanders and you can call me Dr. Z. So how did this show happen to come along? You were really adamant that we take this time for John Denver today. Give us some background.

D: Adamant? I've never been adamant about a thing in my life.

Z: Oh, just a little persistent.

D: Well, the Big Brain Radio Show is about the mind – the human mind – and the experience of the human mind, because our life really is a metaphysical experience. Life is metaphysical. What we actually enjoy, the quality of our life, really is something that we can't put our fingers on. It's weightless. There's no way to measure it. And we'd probably get into trouble trying to do that. And of course, music is a big part of that. You probably know that I have a long musical background starting with Woodstock and dancing to Elvis Presley with my sisters when I was in seventh grade. But John Denver, I happen just have the great opportunity

just to be a close friend of his because Annie Martell his wife went to Gustavus, where I did, and we just became friends over a period of time.

Z: Is it true that John Denver was playing in a coffee house nearby or on campus and that ...

D: He was with the Chad Mitchell Trio ... I think it was called the Mitchell Trio then ... and he saw Annie in the audience and he ...

Z: Where were they playing?

D: I think it might have been at Gustavus.

Z: At Gustavus. And just something about her?

D: He pursued her.

Z: (laughter) At the campus at Gustavus.

D: You know what? I think it was in Mankato actually.

Z: Oh, it was in Mankato.

D: That's right.

Z: Nearby.

D: Yeah. But anyway, he pursued her.

Z: And he started coming around Gustavus?

D: Yeah, he would show up on the campus. He was a very interesting guy because he'd have this big scarf around his neck, and was very, very out there. And for the '60s that just kind of wasn't the way to be. And it took you a while to kind of get used to it because your first thing would be ... you know, some mental thought about who is this guy, etc. And I didn't ...

Z: And he wasn't famous yet or anything. He was just a coffee house singer.

D: No, he was well known. I mean the Mitchell Trio ... he'd already written "Leaving on a Jet Plane" ...

Z: But it wasn't famous yet.

D: Well Peter, Paul & Mary ... Mary had already made it quite famous, yes.

Z: By that time that he was at Gustavus?

D: Oh yeah. Um hmm. Yeah, but he was still trying to find his own ...

Z: Own expression.

D: Yeah and then he went ... on his own he came out with "Rhymes and Reasons", which really kind of took him ... that was his first album that took off.

Z: He had an amazing tenor voice, but he was also an amazing songwriter.

D: Oh. We could even just touch on the songs ... We tried to do a little bit today. So today's show is going to be a little bit different, because we're going to have a lot of music. And just kind of comments along the way. I have lots of stories to tell, but I know people aren't listening to hear my stories. But yet we want to integrate this fact into the musical experience, which is that music is the vibration of life. And life is vibrations and waves. And so even if you weren't a John Denver fan, there's isn't anybody who hasn't been in love ...

Z: Hmm.

D: And you can't hear a love song ... he was a hopeless romantic ...

Z: Yes he was. You can tell when you listen to his songs.

D: We have three sections. One's called "Philosophy and Friends", another one called "Hopeless Romantic" and the other one called "Joyful Songs". And then a little bit of just general ones, but there's a whole other section I wasn't even able to get to which is about nature and his love for

nature. And that runs through songs, but I just didn't think we had time to go into that.

Z: We'll do what we can today. John Denver died on October 12, 1997.

D: 1997.

Z: And why don't you just give a little bit about how he died actually. He was 53 years old.

D: Yeah, he was 53. He was flying a small plane that he had just bought. It was an experimental plane. And John had lost his license because he had some problems with ... he had some drinking episodes that caused the ...

Z: Couple of DUIs, I think.

D: Yeah, so they took away ... and John was an accomplished jet pilot. He had his own lear jet. He was the first civil ... he was the first civilian to be licensed with that kind of jet.

Z: He had a lear jet...

D: Mm hmm.

Z: Wow.

D: Yeah, I got to fly on it many times.

Z: You did?

D: Oh yes. And his father was his pilot. A lot of people don't know that...

Z: He was an Air Force man – his father.

D: Yeah, his father was an Air Force man. John was an Air Force brat, if you can use that term. And he loved his father, and his father was great. And John had other kinds of planes. He had an old bi-plane. When I was looking ... I see he had an accident with it ... I didn't realize. But anyway,

we'd fly ... he'd use that to fly in the mountains because the wings would go (sound) like birds, you know.

Z: Really.

D: And he had this ... above Aspen he had these cabins that used to belong to Teddy Roosevelt. There were all these lakes and horses and stuff up there. It was so far high that the lakes would bubble out. The meniscus was the side, but the middle of the lake would bubble out. So when you looked at the lakes, they were like a big curve.

Z: (laughter)

D: It was just beautiful. And then there would be these waterfalls. And I had to ... we had a party up there once and I sat under the falls with a guy named Joe Frasier... the reason I remember his name is because he sounded like the boxer, but he was an Episcopalian priest, but he used to be one of the Chad Mitchell Trio. So it's kind of interesting people you run into when you've been around John.

Z: So in the end, what happened with that fateful day, October 12, 1997?

D: Well the evidence is that he was flying a plane that he didn't know about... that the gas gauge was backwards ...

Z: And it was behind his head.

D: ... yeah behind his head. And he was using a mirror to look at it. He'd tried to jury-rig something else ... and he goofed.

Z: He ran out of fuel and was trying to switch to the other reserve tank...

D: Yeah.

Z: And something went terribly awry.

D: Yeah, the propeller must have hit him because he was terribly injured.

Z: Yeah, something. I guess people on the shore... he was about 500 feet up, about 120 feet off shore ... they heard a popping noise and they

looked up and they saw the plane come crashing down into the sea. They said it was just devastating ... just despair.

D: I can still remember. I was standing in the hallway of my clinic and a guy came up and he started saying, “Oh, I heard John Denver...” and I almost dropped to my knees.

Z: They didn’t even know that you knew him personally.

D: No, they didn’t know.

Z: Yeah... I think ... he made a huge difference in many people’s lives, and we’re going to tell some stories today. But we have a feeling that there may be somebody out there that also has a great John Denver story. He did live here in Edina from 1968 to 1971. So people may have had the chance to meet and know him.

D: ... with his wife Annie.

Z: Right. So if you want to get in the conversation today ... if you have a John Denver story, or maybe how his songs changed your life, we will take your calls. 952-946-6205. 952-946-6205. This is a special day with a tribute to John Denver. This is Dr. David Stussy ...

D: Songs from the heart.

Z: An old friend of his...

D: And Dr. Z, Dr. Zena Xanders.

Z: That’s right. Come on back. We’ve got lots more stories to tell. This is AM950 Air America Minnesota. We’re the Big Brain Radio Show.

D: Good morning

(music)

D: Welcome back to the Big Brain Radio Show... the John Denver special. And we’re going to crank it up a little bit here. I think I got a little melancholy when we were talking about John ...

Z: Getting all choked up. Flashing back. That's okay.

D: But John was about good times. He really had a good time... we always had good times with him and he knew how to have a good time. He knew how to take care of people. And that song was about Starwood in Aspen. And I can remember going out to Aspen and Annie and John lived in this little apartment ... like we all lived then.

Z: Like regular folk.

D: Like regular folks... Stashed with stuff ... and they always had lots of stuff. And then they were building this place up in Starwood you know and he'd take us up there. And he was so worried about spending all that money. I think Starwood cost like \$100,000 to build.

Z: Oh really, that's all. Was it like a ranch? Or was it just mountain property?

D: No it was a beautiful house, beautiful house. But it just ... you know, this was in the '70s so it just didn't ... you know it was worth millions, I'm sure ... today it would be worth millions ... and then later on he built a thing down below for all the guests that would show up ... that always tended to show up ... that they were always welcoming.

Z: Wow.

D: That cost like a million dollars alone itself. So times changed. But it was just the sincerity and worry you know he had. And that was his first home. So Starwood is ... is... is... kind ... is where he created his base ... so we're going to play just a few more songs and just kind of talk a little bit about John and how he could touch the souls of people.

(music)

Z: Do you know what this song is about in particular? No.

D: It's about ... you know, John would have an experience and then he would write about it.

Z: Hmm...prolific writer.

D: I can remember ... I can remember ... we had this little old house on Third Avenue that I was remodeling when I was school ... when I was in chiropractor school ... and I really did a good job. I tore down bars ... it was real pretty. People liked to come there and just be there because it was pretty. And all of a sudden, it was late at night, and I heard this knock on the door. I opened the door and there's John standing there, and he had just written a song and he wanted to play it. And Petey-pie who was our (laughter)...

Z: Petey-pie?

D: Yeah, we had a guy live with us who was an old college fraternity brother ... just to save money ... and he had an old guitar with I don't even think all the strings were there. John took the guitar and played a song ... and I think the song was "Perhaps Love" ... which became very famous ... and I'll never forget that because ... I don't think I probably appreciated the moment at the time... how unique it was. So... with his songs it was always on the spur of the moment.

Z: Hmm. You know what's so amazing about him is how things must have touched him so deeply ...

D: Yes.

Z: Because he would get so moved and then he'd write this amazing song. Wasn't he actually voted by the Governor of Colorado the Poet Lauriat of Colorado?

D: When he was at the top – the very top – he was like everywhere, and that's when the ... you know Colorado ... well he actually made Colorado famous as far as I could tell...

Z: Yeah.

D: ... Rocky Mountain High and he just loved the mountains. He loved that type of lifestyle. I mean we would go camping with him ... you know the only time I've ever been fly fishing in my life is with John up in the mountains, you know?

Z: Huh. He taught you how to fly fish?

D: He taught me how to fly fish and he taught me how to go ...

Z: Whip it.

D: ...whip it and then I caught the biggest fish!

Z: (laughter) He probably arranged that.

D: Pissed him off.

Z: (laughter) That's cute.

D: Because he's pretty competitive.

Z: That's great.

D: (laughter) We can listen to this one. This is one of my favorites.

(music)

D: So, “_____ and Promises” is kind of like his famous because sitting around the fireplace and that definitely you had to be there type experience. All right?

Z: What year... would we be in the '70s now?

D: Yes it would be.

Z: Right.

D: That was a definite experience because John always had all the equipment and he made you feel like you were doing the right thing and even though you were ... I mean I was totally out of my place ... even though I was like an Eagle Boy Scout, I just felt like I was out of my place when I would go camping with him because ...

Z: You mean he was that adept in nature?

D: I think he was pretty adept. I mean, he always might have been operating a little bit one level below he was because somebody would always show him how to do it, you know, because he always had lots of help and support.

Z: Sure. But he loved even being out camping.

D: Yeah, he loved his family, and he loved Annie and ... you know I think Annie and he were a very unique couple. If things hadn't gotten a little mixed up there they'd probably ... they used to always say that if things didn't work out that she would open a restaurant because her parents had a very beautiful restaurant in St. Peter and that he would just be a minstrel ... you know singing ...

Z: Oh yeah.

D: You know that may have happened... if things hadn't just gotten a little mixed up I think it may have actually happened.

Z: Yes, her parents had the Holiday House...

D: Yeah.

Z: In St. Peter.

D: It was a great place.

Z: Many people may remember that. I actually went to Gustavus as well, for a short time, and we used to go there for Sunday brunch. It was like one of the most ...

D: It was the only place to go. Yeah.

Z: I think ... Marty are you available to tell us a little story, because I think you had an experience at the Holiday House with John Denver. This is our producer here in the studio. This is Marty. This is Marty.

M: Yeah, here I am. I gotta turn my microphone up here. Yeah I did have an experience ... something that I'll never forget. And I know I talked

to you guys about it last week, and you wanted me to save it for today, I guess, right?

D&Z: Yeah

Z: Yeah, go ahead.

M: But ... I'll quickly ... In '75 – 1975 – about 30 years ago, I live in Burnsville ... always have ... and I was cruising along Cliff Road and see this guy with a jacket ... kind of a hero jacket that says “Denver” on the back. He had the hair and I thought, boy this is a John Denver wannabe, and it looked like he was in trouble. His car was alongside the road, so I stop and it's John Denver. I said, “Do you need some help?” You know and he goes, “Well that's very nice.” That's the first thing he did... instead of ... you know he's in a crisis ... you know, if it was my car I'd say oh yeah, I gotta get ... you know ... and he's very gracious about me stopping, you know. And I took him down ... he made a phone call ... and he said “Let me get your number.” I said... “I want to do something for you.” I said “You don't have to do that.” He set up a dinner for my wife and I at the Holiday House ... his in-laws owned the place, as you mentioned. And ... I mean they were so gracious. We had a nice dinner. You know, John called me back a week later and said, “How was it?” I said, “Great. Great.” I mean, what can I say? Just for stopping and helping a guy... even if were a John Denver wannabe, I would have helped him anyway...

Z: Right. Even if he was a nobody, you would have helped him out but...

M: ... but I think John was impressed by that. But I'll never forget when I stopped and he touched my arm and he had this broad smile, you know, and there was nothing phony about that all. You know, but it's something I'll remember always. Just like it happened yesterday.

Z: Do you remember when you heard he died?

M: Oh, I was sad. I thought, wow. I mean, what was he? In his 50s?

D: Yes.

Z: 53.

M: I thought what a shame. What a waste ... of his spirit ... you know?

D: It would be nice to have him around today, writing a few songs about what's going on today because he was way ahead of his time about environment and about war ...

Z: Political things.

D: Yes he would have been a nice person to be ...

Z: Thanks for sharing that Marty.

M: Just a final note... if I think if anybody ever had a brush with John Denver, they'll never forget that... I believe.

Z: Yeah had a magic spirit.

D: He was magic.

Z: He was.

D: He definitely was. I mean, he was not a perfect person...

Z: (laughter) He was a human being.

D: ...But his spirit made up for everybody else's ... where we didn't have it, he would bring it to us. Okay?

Z: That's amazing. Yeah, I was thinking he would have been about 65 now. I mean that was ... so right? Let's see... no, '97. So it's been 8 years.

D: He'd be 61.

Z: 61. He'd be about 61.

D: Anyway... the thing that he... remember, we were all in our twenties and so here is this guy... he's very successful and he's got this charisma. And you know, I'm still trying to figure out any part of life ... and ...

Z: He really was a superstar

D: ...most of the people around us, so he really created a base for a lot of us to operate out of... that have gone on to do quite well. But really I think it's out of his model that he created for us and the fact that you should go for it. Let's hear the next song, should we?

(music)

Z: This is John Denver tribute. We're the Big Brain Radio Show AM 950 Air America Minnesota. Come on back.

(music)

(music)

D: Welcome back to the Big Brain Radio Show. And we're having a John Denver special and we have Mike from St. Paul on the phone.

Z: Are you there Mike?

Mike: Yeah, yeah. Thanks for taking my call.

Z: Sure, tell us your John Denver Story.

D: Thanks for calling.

Mike: Well, first I'll say I like him better now than I did back in the early '70s. I was never a huge fan back then, but I've come to like his music. You look back and those were some really dark times. You had Watergate in the early '70s ... the ongoing war in Viet Nam. But I did have some friends at some Gustavus who had stories about him now and then, but the one that I have is in 1971... I think it was the fall of 1971...Denver was ... he put on an anti-war rally at the old North Star hockey arena there ... where the Mall of America is now.

D: I remember it.

Mike: Do you remember that?

D: Yes.

Mike: Yeah, and that always impressed me about him. I attended it and ... there were ... I never saw anything in that vane where he would do an anti-war thing ... but you know, that's always impressed me looking back. And I think it was Nixon had just started bombing Cambodia... I can't remember what the reason was, but it was ... it was really a neat concert too. I remember he sang some patriotic songs and things that were kind of out of style, you know?

D: Well you know on one of his albums, he actually has some parodies of Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew. Remember that name? Spiro Agnew?

Mike: Spiro Agnew, yes.

D: I'd forgotten it. When did you go to Gustavus?

Mike: No, I didn't ...

D: Oh, okay.

Mike: I went to the University of Minnesota, but I knew some people that attended there from 1964 to ... I graduated from high school in '64 and so the people that I knew that went there.

D: Same here, buddy.

Mike: Pardon me?

D: Same here.

Mike: You're the same age?

D: Yes.

Mike: Ah, you probably know some of the same people.

D: I'm sure we do.

Z: Let's not go there now. We don't want to out anybody now.

Mike: A lot of Swedes from the east side. I'll just say that.

D: Yeah, but we had a good time.

Mike: Well good.

D: Hey, thanks for calling in.

Mike: Hey, what is the name of that album with the Nixon parody?

D: You know, it's one of the first albums. It could be ... it could be Rhymes and Reasons. I think it might be on there.

Mike: Okay. I'll have take a look at that sometime.

Z: Thanks a lot Mike.

Mike: Yep, bye bye.

Z: All right. You know, I read also that John even said right before his death... he had done a couple of concerts ... I think he was in Texas for one of his final concerts ... but he had said that he felt his voice was really coming into its prime. That he actually was becoming even a better singer.

D: Oh, he was.

Z: His later point in his life.

D: You know when he first started singing, he was not a very good singer. I remember ...

Z: Well and I listen to some of the early recordings, I'm like that doesn't sound like the John I remember.

D: We used to give him a hard time. I don't know if everybody remembers... you know he'd always say this "far out" thing.

Z: Far out.

D: And he started being real popular on the Tonight Show, which like ... that was like the big thing.

Z: Oh, this is one of my favorite songs. Oh, it's gone. That was a quick one. But yeah, he was actually maturing and mellowing into this beautiful spirit being with his voice ... it was just amazing. You know he was also in a movie. He was in that movie "Oh God" with George Burns.

D: Yes he was. I have ...

Z: So he was a little bit of an actor too.

D: ... a little story about that. Let's listen to this, but I have a little story about that.

(music)

D: Okay.

(music)

Z: What's the story about ... do you have the Oh God story?

D: Well I have two right there... because that song he was just singing had to ... Looking for Space ... had to do with the S training and he did one of the first S trainings in Aspen, Colorado. And then... I can remember coming over ... we had this townhouse in Edina at the time ... and he and Annie coming in ... telling us about this thing called S training. And I knew right away I should do it, but it took me 10 years.

Z: Oh. He was the one that introduced you.

D: And you know what I did it for? What reason I did it? Procrastination. Took me 10 years to get around...

Z: For those people listening who can remember this with us, the S training is now called Landmark Education. It's actually quite well-known here in Minneapolis.

D: And it's very powerful ... it's a very powerful thing.

Z: S training.

D: Oh God... the thing about that ... when he made that movie I was in Beverly Hills with him. And we snuck into a movie theater after it had start... we had to wait until it was after it started ...

Z: Okay.

D: And he wanted to see the audience reaction. So we all sat in the back.

Z: How exciting. That was the first time he'd seen the show? With you guys?

D: He hadn't seen it in a public ... with the public.

Z: Right. Public venue.

D: So we snuck in the back and we all sat in the back and watched the movie.

Z: Did he... was he happy with the results?

D: Oh, it was so much fun.

Z: That is such an amazing show.

D: Um... There's lots of stories. So let's hear one more story just before we take our news break.

Z: Okay, let's hear some more music by John Denver.

(music)

D: Okay we ...

Z: Okay, that's a little controversial.

D: We got two stories there. The one who said "lost a friend" ... Rocky Mountain High was about him moving to the mountains and said hanging by

a string. He hadn't really had a hit song since Country Roads but he moved anyway. And then "Lost a Friend" was a very good friend of mine named John Munchoff, who got killed on John's motorcycle. And the thing is, John came back with him. He stayed around for the funeral. He sang at the funeral. He didn't have to do all that stuff. And he was just a magnificent person.

Z: You and John Munchoff were in chiropractic college together.

D: Yeah we were.

Z: And you had gone out to visit John and John Munchoff was on a motorcycle.

D: Um hmm. Took off with his motorcycle. The other thing is "Sitting Around the Campfire"... you had to be there ... the experience ... that was ... it was the way it was.

Z: It was whole culture in and of itself.

D: That was a hippie ... culture. A lot of people don't know that about John.

Z: Yeah. That's good. All right. So we're going to news and when we come back, it's more John Denver. Big Brain Radio Show, AM 950 Air America Minnesota.

(music)

D: Hey, welcome back to the Big Brain Radio Show. We have a special... excuse me...

Z: He got all choked up.

D: I get choked up so easy. We have a special guest today. Diana.

Di: Hi.

Z: She makes us great here at the Big Brain Radio Show. She's one of our creative directors, producers.

Di: I love it when you talk that way.

D: And she was so great, yes.

Z: But she got all choked up when we told her we were going to this John Denver show.

Di: I cried in front of people.

D: Want to cry for us on the radio?

Di: Who knows... who knows what can happen. John was a big old hero of mine. Sounds like he was a big old hero of a lot of people.

Z: Well what happened to you in your life out of John's music?

Di: Oh, he just saved my life that's all. No big deal. I came from one of those super dysfunctional, would have made a great segment on Jenny Jones kind of families, you know? All kinds of horror show, drama, nasty, ugly stuff going on day and night and one of the ... this is why people go into radio folks ... is how I ended up being a disc jockey ... I was locked in the house doing housework weekend. Like locked in dude, like indentured servitude. And it was the glorious, glorious '70s and I had a boyfriend who looked just like John Denver ... and played a 12-string just like John Denver ... and I started ... I wasn't allowed to have records, but I started sneaking John Denver records into the house anyway. So they'd lock me in the house on Saturday to do the housework while they went out drinking, and I stayed home and played John Denver.

D: So how did he touch you?

Di: The lyrics, the very sound of his fingertips on the strings, the very breaths, the very laughter inside of some of the words, the achy-ness inside some of the words. John cut through the B.S. like a knife ... very simply and very brightly ... just ... in a day before we knew what a light saber was, John was a light saber. He was knife made out of pure light.

D: Oh, that's a good one.

Di: He could cut right through to what ever it was that was hurting you, holding you back. He could also cut right through to whatever it was that made you fly like the eagle. He could touch whatever the lowest and the highest parts in your soul was ... and that was a gift. And he gave me courage to face life under some of the most difficult circumstances. And ... we even ... in those days ... the '70s were very good to us folks ... you young people don't know what you missed. We even ... we would even incorporate John Denver into church services back in the day.

D: Oh, he was, yes.

Di: You know, it was the day of the folk service ... you know... you could play guitar and wear blue jeans and stuff.

D: He was a definite big brain because he represented all sides of life.

Di: Yeah.

D: He could show the sad part and the high part and everything in between, and it didn't dictate the way you had to be. It was just something you expressed because we have to express all parts of ourselves in order to be whole.

Di: Light and dark. Ying and Yang. Every side of it.

D: Light and dark. Ying and Yang.

Di: And he brought it out in a poetry that was amazing. And when John went through things, we went through things. When John was happy, it touched our happiness. When John was sad, it touched our sadness. And I was talking to a friend the other night and said yeah, but when he did that thing with the Muppets, didn't that just destroy his credibility. I said, no, no, you gotta keep in mind John was at that time addressing an audience that had been with them since before they'd been married and had babies and now he was addressing his audience with babies and here was something we could all do together, sit down and watch John Denver on the Muppets.

D: I think he thought everybody would want to do that. He did it like ... like he had this opportunity to be with the Muppets. How many people get a chance to be with the Muppets?

Di: I've never worked with Kermit or Miss Piggy.

D: That's right.

Di: Gall dernit.

D: Well thank you very much for ...

Di: Hey, thanks.

Z: You reminded me... it's almost like John knew how to play our heart strings as _____ as he knew how to play those guitar strings.

Di: There's the poetry.

Z: It just kind of grabbed it. Thank you Diana... very lovely.

Di: Thank you doctors.

Z: Thanks John.

D: Now I know not to lock her in the room anymore.

Di: (laughter) See what happens?

(music)

D: John Denver. So we're spending our time talking ... admiring the music of John Denver and now we're going to go to some music that's a little more on the ... John was a hopeless romantic.

Z: Oh man, was he! He could make ... oh, your heart... just ...oh... melt!

D: He loved love and he loved for love. So we put together some of the love songs ... and in a second one of them will show up here.

Z; Okay. This is the first love song?

(music)

D: Makes you want to sing along, doesn't it?

Z: ... in the desert ... I was just going to start singing when you said that. How can you not?

D: That's "Annie's Song"... and of course, I had the privilege of knowing Annie. She's a beautiful woman... a beautiful heart ... she really took care of people.

Z: She really captured John, my goodness!

D: Well, the other thing you have to remember ... John's got all these people coming, but he's a typical guy. He wasn't the one that took care of all of them. Annie took care of them. So he took ... she took the responsibility of making sure everybody was involved and taken care of, because he'd disappear ...

Z: All the people that came around?

D: Yeah, he was a little boy. You know? One of the things about those guys ... they never really ... they were on the road all the time. People did all kinds of stuff for them. Anything you would usually pay for ... someone else paid for. I don't think those boys ever really totally grew up. Until John got into his 50s.

Z: Right. So she really was the social hostess and glue for the early part of his career.

D: She was the metaphysical glue for John's songs, as far as I'm concerned. Okay?

Z: That's great. And they did share two beautiful children.

D: Mm hmm.

Z: They have two children. Zachary and ... do you remember her name?

D: Kate... um... oh, Anna Kate.

Z: Anna Kate.

D: That's right.

Z: And then he later had another daughter, I believe.

D: Mm hmm.

Z: Yes.

D: So Annie ...

Z: Jessie... Jess... Jessie

D: Mm hmm. So Annie, if you get a chance to ever hear this, we love you and we know who you are.

Z: Yeah. Behind every great man, is typically an even greater woman.

D: No kidding.

Z: That's right. Sweet.

D: So we're talking about the romantic side... and this is really ... well this song is very interesting because you can feel a little bit ... there's a little challenge going on in this relationship.

Z: Let's hear it.

(music)

Z: What is he talking about here? Do you know? Wait a second. I love this. Did he ever talk to you about his songwriting and what he's writing about?

D: Oh yes. John was very philosophical. I remember one time I got into a philosophical conversation with him about some health thing and about the spirit ... and ... John was always interested in that. You know he went on to form the Windstar Foundation. He put on a special birthday party for

Buckminster Fuller because Buckminster Fuller had such a big vision. He helped form the Hunger Foundation, the Plant thing... where they planted all the trees... I think Planet was the name of it. He helped lots of ... the President Nixon... the President's environment issues. In fact, he was there when Clinton signed the bill. I mean he had a real ...

Z: Bill Clinton's a big John Denver fan and supporter I believe.

(music)

Z: You know, I have flashbacks with these songs too because I was growing up during this time and my mom loved John Denver. And she started playing guitar because of John Denver. So ... I have really fond memories ...

D: She started playing guitar?

Z: Yeah, she actually took up guitar.

D: How old was she?

Z: Oh, she must have been in her 40s then, I guess.

D: Far out ... as John would say.

Z: Far out... Actually I think she may have even met John Denver at your clinic, because when he was in town, he'd come in to get adjusted.

D: He came in ...

Z: I actually have a picture with John Denver.

D: He came in my clinic and he came when we were doing a picture for Christmas.

Z: Oh, that's right. He was in one of your Christmas cards.

D: Christmas cards. So he pulled up to get a ... he was here for a concert... he pulled up to get an adjustment and he ...we were just doing the picture so we had him get in there ... but we didn't name him on the card.

Z: You left him anonymous.

D: But everybody knew who it was.

Z: Hey, John Denver's working at Dr. Stussy's office.

D: That was a lot of fun. Yeah... he would come into the ... you know I would go on the road with him to treat him ... you know he had lots of people that helped him like that. But ... the biggest one of course ... was when I got to stay in the Beverly Hotels bungalows. I mean that was ... I'd never ...

Z: For a small town Wells boy, did it kind of get your attention?

D: Well, those bungalows, you know ... they're in the back of the Hotel ... and they connect and you can order food anytime ... these guys would order all this food at midnight you know, or two in the morning...

Z: All the special stuff.

D: Oh, it was very special... and then we'd go to the recording sessions ... it was great. So ... his music was really joyful. You can see that.

Z: Yeah, very joyful.

D: Very joyful.

Z: Was this while you were still in college then, or was this after the college...

D: Oh now, I was a chiropractor then.

Z: Oh you were chiropractor.

D: I took a few months off. I got John Reed, I think, to take over my practice ... I can't remember ... he was wondering when I was ever going to come back.

Z: (laughter) And you took off with John Denver?

D: Now this is part of what's called the trilogy.

Z: This is great. Let's listen a second.

(music)

D: You know we all have had to leave people ...

Z: I had to get the Kleenex out now.

D: We've all left people we love because we had things to do ... and we know we have to do it... and they know it too. So we had these songs... and the next one is another one of those songs.

(music)

Z; This is part of a trilogy? Is that what you...

D: Yeah, I think they call it the leaving ... you know it's about lovers and being separated. And we've all ... See that's why John's so great because you could identify with that. And we've all done it. You know we're supposed to be big about it. And it's his way of expressing his mixed feelings that we all have ... we still have to go forward.

Z: Oh, here's one more. This is the third in the trilogy? Yes.

D: Mm hmm.

(music)

D: I'll tell you ... there isn't anybody that can't identify with that one. Because who doesn't want to share what they have ... in that song he was sharing ... he wanted to share his life ... and ...

Z: Follow me.

D: Follow me... up and down ... what I do ... and he put that in that song.

Z: You know that song, “Leaving on a Jet Plane” ... excuse my nasal sounding voice ... he wrote that song, but it really became famous when Peter, Paul and Mary did it.

D: Right. Yes. And that’s what ... he became known as a songwriter first. But I can remember when he ... I saw him get a check for \$100,000 just in the royalties of that.

Z: Wow.

D: Of course, this was in the ‘70s.

Z: That would be worth a lot. That would be comparable ...

D: Ahhhh

Z: What would that be... like a half a million, million dollars today? I don’t know ... what that would be ...

D: Oh, who knows. Somebody out there probably knows, but it’s a lot of money.

(music)

Z: Oh, classic.

(music)

D: You know he could take an experience and he just crystallized it, you know?

Z: Yes. He could take.

D: I mean you could be having the same experience ... that was it ... but I didn’t know it.

Z: Right. He could take the essence of what was happening in that moment.

D: His words to explain that ... you know... like...

Z: Can't you just feel the warmth of the sun on your body when you hear this? You know, John Denver was a big brain. And I guess that's why we're doing this tribute, because he took his physical brain and merged it in a metaphysical way.

D: Well sensory input ... everything that came into him was a sensory but he had a way of interpreting ... for the motor response ... obviously is his feelings and his ability to put it down on people and talk about it.

Z: And translate it into a spiritual metaphysical realm.

D: Yeah, then it goes off to the universe ...

Z: To the universe.

D: It's probably still traveling out there.

Z: Yeah.

D: Who knows where it's going.

Z: Wow.

D: Because it's the ... the big brain is connected to how far? We don't know.

Z: That's right.

D: So, we have one last phase that we're going to do, which is called happy songs.

Z: Happy songs.

D: Well this is Shanghai ... is this Shanghai? Maybe I think it is.

Z: Is this the romantic realm we've been in?

D: Oh, we've been in the romantic realm.

Z: Yes, it's been very romantic. All dreamy.

(music)

Z: We miss you John.

(music)

D: Can you say that again? I mean you hear it, you know it, but you can't repeat those words. They're so ... into our senses... even the rhythm and the way he combined the music. So we have a ... When we come back I think we'll get to the whole ... the joyful songs because he was a lot of fun.

Z: Yeah. I don't think I can take much more of this. I'm going to be on the floor in a puddle pretty soon.

D: That's why his concerts were so much fun. Okay?

Z: Oh, so much fun.

D: I saw so many, but they were always great.

Z: That's great. Hey, if you have anything else to share, we've got one more section with John Denver today. The number is 952-946-6205 and we'd love to hear from you. 952-946-6205. This is the Big Brain Radio Show on AM 950 Air America Minnesota.

(music)

(music)

D: Welcome back to the Big Brain Radio Show. This is the last half. We usually call this "Stuff that Works", but since John is "stuff that works"...

Z: John is totally stuff that works.

D: ...we're just going to continue and hopefully we'll get this last segment going here. That's Shanghai Breezes... I always loved that song because I know that he was far, far away from the person he loved when he wrote that song...

Z: When he was in China.

D: ...when he was in China. And it's just ... there isn't a person that couldn't ...

(music)

D: A little upbeat. You know John had a really upbeat side, you know, if we can get to like the Old Feather Bed, and Country Boy, and of course West Virginia ... he loved to take songs and make them happy and playful... and he really had a good take on it. So that's why his concerts were so good because he covered the whole panorama of being human.

Z: Human experience. This is a quote from John Denver: "There's one piece of advice my dad gave me when he dropped me off at college. He said, 'You've got the talent. You can sing and play the guitar. That doesn't make you better than anyone else.'" Keeping him humble there.

D: His dad was definitely an Air Force ...

Z: Yeah, he was probably pretty strict, his dad.

D: Yeah.

Z: Yeah. I think he wasn't exactly excited about John's choice for careers in the beginning.

D: No, he was not.

Z: But eventually he came around.

D: Of course he did. He was his greatest admirer. Like I said, he was his pilot for years.

Z: His dad was his pilot?

D: Yeah, for the lear jet. Yeah.

Z: I didn't quite understand that.

D: Yeah, John got to fly sometimes.

Z: Wow. Daddy had...

D: Yeah... and there was another pilot... I can't remember his name now, but he was always there too. And... the flying part was cool.

Z: Wow, that's pretty great. Another John Denver quote: "I believe that we are here for each other – not against each other. Everything comes from an understanding that you are a gift in my life, whoever you are, whatever our differences." John Denver.

D: Yeah.

(music)

D: We might not be able to get those songs up, so ... let's just keep going, okay?

(music)

D: The one thing I want to say about John is that he was generous to a fault. And we had the memorial at Northwestern Chiropractic School ...

Z: Yeah, right, you did.

D: ...and he came and he played for ...

Z: It was a fundraiser, wasn't it?

D: ...Fundraiser, uh huh... For the 50th anniversary.

Z: 50th Anniversary of the college.

D: So he came and he performed, just outstandingly... And I got a chance to introduce him, so that was a big thing for me...

Z: Yes, in front of all your peers and colleagues.

D: Yeah and then we got to go out afterwards ... and he ... and I know that he gave lots and lots of times for ... like the guy on the phone was surprised ... he was definitely involved in the anti-war movement. He was involved in the hunger project ... and all kinds of things that he gave his time for constantly ... and I'm sure to an extent where you would not expect a person to do that. If you ever asked him to do something he would do it. Even in his local community he would do things all the time also.

Z: You know I'm just kind of flashing here ... You know the one person that's doing that today is Oprah. You know these people that make all this money ... they're basically superstars. Because John was a superstar in his time ... and Oprah ... and they use their money to do good in the world ... and to make a difference for people. And I think John did that before it was really popular or in the consciousness to do it. And he did it on fronts that were a little bit controversial and out there. But he went ahead and supported those causes.

D: Well especially at that time. I mean they took down names. They found out that his name was in the FBI thing because he was an anti-war thing ... they took names and lists in those days... it was no different...

Z: That's right.

D: ...but a lot of people who are part of the establishment now are surprised to find their names on these lists that ... but when the freedom ... Privacy of Freedom Act came out they were able to discover that we were kind of on those lists.

Z: John said, "We must begin to make what I call conscious choices and to really recognize that we are the same. It's from that place in my heart that I write my songs." Boy, really he did find that common thread that we all share... and speak to that in his music.

D: He did... and ... it's real thing that's kind of missing because ... I actually had ... you know how you go through phases and you listen to things ... I had a chance to listen to a lot of these songs again ... and there isn't a song that doesn't have a memory for me. And I'm sure it's that way for a lot of people.

Z: Mm hmm. Yeah he had quite a broad spectrum of listeners.

D: Mm hmm.

Z: You know, over country, and popular ... all ages.

D: Well here look it ... listen to this ... this is just his experience right here.

(music)

Z: As we're kind of wrapping up our John Denver tribute, we just want to let you know next week we'll have an interview with Dr. ... another big brain in your life ... one of the Johns ... you've had several Johns ... Dr. John DeMartini will be with us talking about transformational work ... the break-through relationship. So listen again next Saturday at 11:00. And we are also beginning our health style makeover this week with several people coming in to work with us. We'll give you an update on that next week.

D: You know, before we forget ... there are several people that I want to thank...

Z: Yes that have played a big role this week in helping us do our John Denver tribute.

D: Diana, for her time to help us get this music on a disc so we could actually play it in the background like this.

Z: Yeah, it was great. Thanks, Diana.

D: And of course she just doesn't do anything simply, she has to do it well.

Z: And John Denver made a big difference in her life.

D: And ... and our ...

Z: Oh yes, and of course, our producer on the boards... Marty. Thank you Marty and thank you for your story.

D: Yes, it was wonderful. Marty is so great ... and he ... I tend to come in at the last minute with all these things and Marty always makes them work.

Z: He makes it work. And I want to thank you David, for bringing your friend.

D: It was a pleasure. We ... we ... many of us loved John Denver. Are you going to cry?

Z: I'm already crying. Well, thank you to the superstar, John Denver.

D: He had a way of pulling it out ... and we want to do an acknowledgement that was a little bit different ... where it wasn't just people talking ... you're hearing his music...

Z: We say every week, remember the big brains in your life: the ones you know, the ones you will know and the ones you used to know.

D: The ones you used to know.

Z: And John Denver covers all those spectrums.

D: You know what's amazing since we started doing the ... a lot of the big brains have started showing back up in our lives too... So we have a huge connection with everybody... our minds ... everybody you know in your life is a big brain. So thank you very much ... We hope to see you next Saturday morning.

Z: Yes. Thanks John Denver ... connecting all of us big brains. I'm Dr. Z, this is Dr. D... we are the Big Brain Radio Show. This is AM 950 Air America Minnesota.

(music)