

Finding my Voice: Peter 'Captain' Edwards



I arrived with my parents in a small village called Newton near Cambridge from South Africa in 1960, after a period of acceptance by the villagers and school children, I became friends with among others another a young man called Robin from Sawston who convinced me that going to a folk club called 'The Rob Roy' upstairs room and sitting on cushions with the Cambridge Crofters performing was the best way to meet young girls especially foreign ones keen to learn English.

This was my introduction into the 'Folk World'; I enjoyed joining in with all the chorus songs even if I didn't know the words or the songs message. The visits to 'The Rob Roy' continued until Robin went to UEA as a mature student, I visited him occasionally and we always seemed to end up in pubs with 'singarounds' where we were routinely be asked if we would like to sing which certainly terrified me, but also made me feel guilty that I was listening to others and not contributing, a feeling that stayed with me.

Years passed with no contact with the 'Folk world' with the exception of yearly visits to the Cambridge folk festival. Still interested in folk music, but married now with young children, my wife Ruth suggested I go to a Folk Club at Fulbourn to see it was my cup of tea so I enlisted a friend to go with me and enjoyed the evening and heard about the Cherryhinton Folk club and became a regular visitor.

About this time Robin had moved to the Wye valley and had started to collect sea shanty recorded music from The Shanty Crew, Johnny Collins and others. He invited us to join him and his family camping at the Bromyard Folk festival, I joined in with the Johnny Collins and friends sessions choruses at every opportunity. We went for a few years but our children were growing up. My wife Ruth decided to go to a Singing in Tune workshops in Cambridge and I followed later, I didn't mind singing in a group but was still terrified to sing on my own but it did begin to build up my confidence.

While doing the workshops I decided to learn some songs inevitably from the shanty crew and Johnny Collins tapes, learning on journeys to and from work. I made a tape of me singing not knowing what my voice sounded like and played it to my 14 year old daughter Hannah who said it was OK so emboldened I decided to sing at a Cherryhinton folk club visit hosted by the lovely Barry and Rose I plucked up courage (by way of a number of pints of beer) and when asked if I would like to sing by Rose I answered faulting yes and that was my wobbly start to singing in public.

This shaky start inspired me to learn new songs and then try them out at the Cherry Hinton and Fulbourn folk clubs and latterly The Red Lion at Whittlesford . As my confidence grew I branched out with a small selection of songs, I researched for venues in my local area as well as those at my holiday destinations and folk festivals. I stuck fairly rigidly to singarounds but did end up on stage a few times as well as singing at the front but much preferred singarounds.

I was now feeling a lot more comfortable in singarounds, I started to take more notice of others and the huge amount of musical talent that exists at singarounds. Unfortunately all my 'go to' folk clubs closed so I was without a regular venue, Ruth (My wife) mentioned she had met a certain Tony Phillips through her work on a bike project 'You Can Bike Too' Tony, she told me ran music festivals and regular singarounds at The Plough and Fleece Horningsea (soon to become a community pub).

This was just what I was looking for, so I plucked up courage and went along. I had never been to such a welcoming singaround, Tony was outstanding in his approach of inclusivity. So still clinging desperately to my songsheets I started singing at my new base, I started to feel even more confident than I was before, so much so that Ruth told me to try standing up when singing and this coupled with the great support and encouragement of Tony and others I started remembering words to songs and now rarely need the songsheets.

After several years of singarounds and festivals at the Plough and Fleece, Tony decided to start the 'Rolling on project' visiting as many venues in the UK as possible and he has very kindly invited me to go along with him. I would encourage anyone reading this to refer to the places visited as it is a great resource for keeping music alive.

