

# How I First Heard The Four Freshmen

By Ron Stanley

I have been a Four Freshmen fan and supporter since I heard them in my college days (the early fifties) while attending San Jose State College.

It was 1955, and The Four Freshmen were performing at a little hole-in-the-wall on Market Street in San Francisco. I had to see them live. My date for the evening (later to become my wife), also a fan, and I decided to head across the bridge to attend the show. We thought we had planned to leave early enough to get there so we could get a good seat. Unfortunately, the traffic was heavier than expected. When we arrived, were informed that all seats were filled. It was standing room only - in the back of the room.

I took a five-dollar bill from my wallet and showed it to the doorman and said, "Don't you think you could find us a little table up front?" Can you remember what five dollars was worth in 1955? Well, it worked. He whispered to one of the ushers and shortly thereafter we saw a tiny 18 inch table along with two small chairs being carried toward the bandstand. He motioned us to follow. WOW!

We sat down and were at about knee level with the boys. We were in seventh heaven. Shortly thereafter, the performance started. We both had goose bumps listening to the guys perform. During one of their romantic songs, my date and I looked at each other with stars in our eyes and slowly started to bring our lips together. At about four inches apart, the slide from Bob Flanigan's trombone came between our lips and startled us. I looked up to see that ever present grin on his face and a raised index finger slightly moving from side to side saying, "no, no, no." Those in the audience close enough to see what was happening were laughing and cheering. My date was turning three shades of purple. We decided to behave ourselves for the rest of the performance, but did catch a few audience members sneaking peeks to make sure we were being good.

Fast forward to 2007. The Four Freshmen Society Convention was being held in Portland, Oregon. We decided to drive up in our brand new car and attend. Bob and Ross were there in the roles of MC and hosts. I was hopeful that I would have the opportunity to talk to  
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# "Grab your coat and get your hat..."

by Trudy Feigum

*...Leave your worries on the doorstep;  
just direct your feet to the sunny side of the street!"*

Can you think of a more encouraging song today? The Four Freshmen put their unique harmonies to an arrangement by Billy May of *The Sunny Side of the Street* in May 1961 on their *Voices in Fun* album. The melody was by Jimmy McHugh; lyrics were by Dorothy Fields.

Give thought to when this song was written: 1930! This was right after the crash of the stock market, moving into the Great Depression. The lyrics reveal the song's progression from sadness to optimism. There's an opening verse that is rarely sung:

*"Walked with no-one  
and talked with  
no-one,  
And I had nothing but  
shadows.  
Then one morning you  
passed  
And I brightened at last.  
Now I greet the day,  
and complete  
the day,  
With the sun  
in my heart.  
All my worry blew away  
When you taught me  
how to say: ..."*



Toward the end of the song is a likely reference to the Depression, "If I never have a cent, I'll be rich as..." The lyrics, as written, cite the name of the man touted to be the richest of all time, Rockefeller. The Four Freshmen substituted the name of the first and most well-known gossip columnist and screenwriter, Louella Parsons.

The 1930s were not a walk-in-the-park for a lot of people, but out of that agony for so many came this upbeat instruction to keep your focus on the positive and not get weighed down with the negative. What better way to help lift our spirits during this time of ongoing shutdowns and cancellations, including the 2021 FFS convention, than to hear the bright sounds these four talented guys produce?

As an aside, many of us who have sung with the Wannabees at conventions over the years have been privileged to sit under the tutelage of original Four Freshmen, Ross Barbour, as well as Four Freshmen; Kirk Marcy, Greg Stegeman, and Vince Johnson. If there is one direction none of us should forget, it's to sing loud and bright! It's something I'm reminded of every time I listen to The Four Freshmen. Whether it's *The Sunny Side of the Street*, or any of the vast number of songs they've stamped indelibly on our memories, The Four Freshmen's tones are bright. You can't listen and not feel better!