

My Brother

A war in a distant land raged. Many protested. And

showed their own rage against that napalm-infused country half a globe away. Others protested against the protesters. God and country were alive and should be honored and exulted. We can never give up the ship and let our principles and government be tarnished was their mantra.

For every song against the war like “For What It’s Worth” written by Steven Stills and recorded by Buffalo Springfield, there was a song supporting our warriors like “Ballad of the Green Berets” written and performed by Staff Sergeant Barry Sadler.⁴ There didn’t seem to be a middle ground.

And then along came “He Ain’t Heavy, He’s My Brother.” Written by Bob Russell and Bobby Scott, it seemed to speak to both extremes. The protesters claimed everyone, every race, was our brother and we had to do what we could to help that person. His problems and differences weren’t too heavy for us. His issues were something we needed to embrace and help him through.

The loyalists, either actually or viscerally, saw and tasted the blood that was shed in battle. It was a brutal war. Nearly 60,000 died. Horribly at times. What is not horrible about a life taken far too young? And for what? But when you are in a foxhole and your mate, who has gone through training with you, waded through rice paddies with you and dodged bullets with you, goes down...you pick him up. Your only thought is that “I must save his life.” He is not too heavy to carry out. He is my brother.

I love this song. It speaks to me. It did back then. It still does today. Perhaps even more so because much of the strife and extremes of that era are still with us

. The road is indeed long with many winding turns to which we know not where it will end. But it will end. Yet, somewhere along the way, we are guaranteed tough times. Who is going to be there to help us through those tough times?

As we look across the room, into the eyes of another, what do we see? What trouble lies behind those eyes. What is the struggle within? What burden does he have that I can share with him? And be glad to do it. Because I love my brother.

A lawyer once asked Jesus to explain who exactly was his neighbor when told to love his neighbor as himself. The great teacher told the story of the Good Samaritan, a man of another race, religion and culture that saved and cared for a Jewish man who had been beaten and bloodied, left for dead.

Brotherhood knows no boundaries. His burden is not too heavy to share. To carry. His well-being is my concern. I am glad to share his burden and grateful he will help me bear mine.

He's not heavy. He's my brother.

The road is long
With many a winding turn
That leads us to who knows where
Who knows where
But I'm strong
Strong enough to carry him
He ain't heavy, he's my brother

... So on we go
His welfare is of my concern
No burden is he to bear
We'll get there

... For I know
He would not encumber me
He ain't heavy, he's my brother

... If I'm laden at all
I'm laden with sadness
That everyone's heart
Isn't filled with the gladness
Of love for one another

... It's a long, long road
From which there is no return
While we're on the way to there
Why not share

... And the load
Doesn't weigh me down at all
He ain't heavy he's my brother

... He's my brother_s

– The Hollies
(Bob Russell, Bobby Scott)

Commentary

Brotherhood. It's a word, a concept, that is thrown around a lot these days. Sports teams, fraternities, even corporations that profess a social consciousness embrace the term. I question its authenticity. And there is nothing wrong with such a query. Until one understands the true

and complete sacrifice one has to make to truly put someone else's situation—someone else's being, someone else's life—before theirs, they aren't getting it. The gospel of John says that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for his brother. His friends. Wow. That's a lot to ask, you may say. But to understand the true meaning of brotherhood: caring for a person's well-being over yours, grieving with him, celebrating with her - that concept not only has to be understood, but taken to heart. Because it is changes of the heart that result in changes in character. Not the head.