

# AMERICAN WAY

June 2015

Chris Pratt stands in a dark grey suit with a teal tie, holding a silver paint bucket. The background is black with yellow paint splatters. The floor is also black with yellow paint splatters.

## MAKING A SPLASH

With *Jurassic World*,  
Chris Pratt proves  
he's box-office gold

## CHICAGO'S SOUL

Why Devon Avenue is  
the Windy City's most  
culturally rich neighborhood

## LINDSEY BUCKINGHAM

On Fleetwood Mac's  
new fans and next album

## EDITOR'S NOTE

By Adam Pitluk



# STORY OF A LIFE

**I** CAN SEE MYSELF, IT'S A GOLDEN SUNRISE.  
“Daddy!” my 6-year-old, Lilly, screams as I walk through the door. She rushes toward me and barrels into my stomach while throwing her arms around my waist.

“Hi, baby,” I reply as I drop my luggage and lift her up, engulfing her in a giant bear hug.

My 9-year-old, Maddy, is in the other room engrossed in *Minecraft* on her iPad. I walk into the room where she's playing and announce my presence, giving her the benefit of the doubt that she didn't hear Lilly's proclamation from a room with only one half-wall separating the noise from Maddy's ears. “Hi, honey! Daddy's home.”

“Hey, Dad,” she says without looking up.

“I missed you,” I say while staring at her, hoping she'll take her eyes off the game and come give me a giant hug like she did when she was Lilly's age.

“Missed you, too.”

And the game goes on.

I've been in a super-romantic mood over the last six or eight months — leading up to this tear-my-heart-out-of-my-chest exchange with Maddy — much like a young singer-songwriter named Harry Chapin was in the summer of 1979 when he spoke of his own romantic mood in concert. He had recently written a song called “Story of a Life,” and after he explained its meaning to the audience, the 36-year-old sat relaxed upon a stool — acoustic guitar in hand — and slowly began to pick and sing.

A smile pursed Harry's lips as he crooned the lyrics. Like all of his songs, this one was more of a short story of the everyman's life, accompanied by a catchy tune.

And I've been thinking a lot about Harry Chapin lately

because this incident with Maddy was not isolated, although it hurt more than most. To be fair, I've been on the road a lot these days. It's hard for me to leave home, much like it was for my dad; much like it's been for every working parent in the history of ever. It's because I've been on the road so much that Lilly was overjoyed when her daddy returned. Yet it's this same frequency of travel that may have hardened Maddy.

*And the wind will whip your tousled hair; the sun, the rain, the sweet despair; great tales of love and strife.*

Harry Chapin factors into this situation and into my home life for several reasons. By the end of this column, he'll have factored into yours as well.

He was a folk singer in the 1970s and early 1980s who cut his teeth playing the guitar for a smattering of listeners in New York's Greenwich Village. He received minimal radio play at first because his songs were too long for the three-minute pop format of the time. But he toured voraciously, and he and his band crisscrossed the country playing to audiences big and small. As with most folk art, Harry's success and notoriety came not over the airwaves, but from small-town DJs and word-of-mouth reviews, as well as the reviews of the local papers across the country. One of his biggest successes came when he put music behind a poem his wife wrote.

Sandy Chapin wrote a poem called “Cat's in the Cradle,” about her first husband's relationship with his father. Harry came home one day from a long road stint and asked his wife — who was an accomplished writer in her own right — what

she'd been working on. She showed him the poem. He put it aside and asked what else she'd been writing.

Eighteen months later, their son, Josh, was born, and Sandy reminded Harry about the poem, showing it to him again. “Wow,” was Harry's reply after rereading the poem. “This is really

fantastic.” He got back on the road later that year and told an audience during the introduction, “Frankly, this song scares me to death.”

My dad was a huge Harry Chapin fan, and I grew up listening to Harry's music on our record player. As I matured, I listened to him on our car's tape deck. Growing older still, I listened to him on my car's CD player. These days, Maddy and Lilly know the words to Harry Chapin songs because they're in my iTunes account. And these days, Harry's stories — most of which were written before I was born in 1976 — have new meaning for me. You see, I'm afraid that I'm becoming the father in “Cat's in the Cradle.” And it scares me to death.

Growing up, I couldn't listen all the way through the song

**IT'S HARD FOR ME TO LEAVE HOME, MUCH LIKE IT WAS FOR MY DAD; MUCH LIKE IT'S BEEN FOR EVERY WORKING PARENT IN THE HISTORY OF EVER.**



Tune to Channel 7 on your in-flight radio stations to listen to our "Spotlight: Harry Chapin," narrated by Chapin's drummer, Howard Fields.

without choking up because I would think of my relationship with my dad, and I would think about his relationship with his dad. His dad, Kenneth, a Holocaust survivor, died in June 1981. My dad was 31 at the time. Harry Chapin died in a tragic car accident the following month. He was 38 years old. I'm 38 years old.

I remember hearing "Cat's in the Cradle" coming from my dad's record player and tape deck a lot after June 1981.

It is my hope with this column to bring those of you old enough to remember Harry Chapin back to the 1970s and the golden age of folk-rock storytelling. It is also my hope to get you sons and daughters out there to listen to what America sounded like when your parents were your age. But what's more, I want to make sure that as we near the 34th anniversary of that tragic July day on the Long Island Expressway, Harry is not forgotten and that his stories are still told. To put emphasis behind that point, I reached out to Sandy Chapin, Harry's widow.

Sandy, now 80, answered the phone with so much energy and with such delight. She was ecstatic that someone from my generation would want to lead a charge to remind the world about what her husband was able to accomplish as a musician and a humanitarian by the time of his death at 38 (he co-founded the WhyHunger organization in 1975 to combat poverty). "Harry was the same way," she said of her late husband's can-do spirit. "He used to say, 'When in doubt, do it.' He'd be watching a hockey game on TV, listening to a basketball game on a transistor radio, talking to the kids and writing a song, all at the same time. And he always had something to say about everything."

She speaks in the same manner that he sang. There are no one- or two-word answers. There are no one- or two-sentence answers either. Her responses to the questions were well thought out, and they were fashioned into a story,

too long to print in its entirety, yet too consequential to gloss over. This quote, about whether Harry's music is still relevant, is pretty weighty.

"I still get letters from people who tell me how Harry's music changed their lives, and how at low moments, they'd sit and listen to one song after another," she says. "Harry's public persona was very, very upbeat. He had phrases like *onwards and upwards* and *no problem*. He kept himself from being down. He's either up or he's out, meaning he's either happy or he's asleep.

"His way of dealing with the little hurts in life was to put them in his songs. 'Mr. Tanner,' for instance, is about the bad reviews he received. He's working out his feelings about getting bad reviews and he based it on a real story about a man from Dayton who got bad reviews in *The New York Times*. But the feeling in the song comes from his own feelings. It's hard to find a song that wasn't based on a personal emotional experience, or on a particular person or place."

*And there are times you change your stride; there are times you can't decide. Still you go on.*

Take a moment, won't you, to reacquaint yourself with Harry Chapin's musical story. If you've never heard of him before, try going about your daily grind with him playing in the background. He'll help you deal with the little hurts in life, like the one with my Maddy.

*And I can see it clear out to the end, and I'll whisper to her now again, because she shared my life. For more than all the ghosts of glory, she makes up the story: She's the only story, of my life.*

**Adam Pitluk**  
Editor



Follow Adam on Twitter @adampitluk



CASHINYOURDIAMONDS.COM

# Sell Your Unwanted Diamonds For Cash



## Because Trust Matters

With over 30 years of experience in the diamond business, you can feel confident that you are receiving maximum value for your jewelry from a discreet buyer you can trust.



Call  
**937-436-2852**

to speak to John Stafford personally.

CashInYourDiamonds.Com is a premium buyer of high quality diamond jewelry.

CASHINYOURDIAMONDS.COM