



The
Promise *of the* Sowing

DAN SCHATZ

1. The Promise of Sowing

© 2010 by Dan Schatz

Dan: vocal, guitar, bass / Mara: harmony vocal

Written in response to the BP oil spill in 2010, this song has stayed all too current. Extracting fuel for energy – whether through drilling, fracking, pipelines, or mountaintop removal – without regard to the local soil and water leads to disasters, and when farming communities and fisheries die, entire cultures get destroyed. The good news is that an increasingly interconnected world has led to more support organizations, stronger networks, and better advocacy.

Down to water's edges
in the first light of the sun
Where the fishermen are gathered
by their moorings
Another day of labor in the waters
off these shores
Is another week of food
to raise your children
But the river's running empty
and the seas are growing warm
And the oil they spilled
has poisoned all the fisheries
The catch is growing smaller
'till there's nothing left to find
But a job at some big box store in the city

And remember the years when the waters ran clear
And the fields restored the promise of the sowing
And the breezes blew clean
and the warmth of Summer's green
On ancient hills gave strength to keep us going

Out among the furrows
we've ploughed these fifty years
My father's hands and mine
have made a living
Silver Queen in even years
and soybeans in the off
Fed by waters rippling clear
from eastern mountains
But the hills are being leveled
for the coal that lies within
And the brooks are flowing black
with nature's refuse
The soils are wrecked with cadmium;
they've stripped the ridges bare
And we've watched our family's pride
all turned to wasteland

But remember the years when the waters ran clear
And the fields restored the promise of the sowing
And the breezes blew clean
and the warmth of Summer's green
On ancient hills gave strength to keep us going

I won't pretend to understand
the reasons for it all
But I know we've wasted years
in wrong directions
If the nourishment is stolen
from the waters and the soil,
How are we to feed the generations?
But the answer lies within us
and it's only common sense –
To soil the pond we live in
is disaster

Alone we only crumble,
but together we have power
To lift our hands and voices
for the future

And to work for the years when the waters run clear
And the fields restore the promise of the sowing
And the breezes blow clean
and the warmth of Summer's green
On ancient hills gives strength to keep us going
And keep us sowing

2. Gone Gonna Rise Again

© 1975 by Si Kahn, Joe Hill Music (ASCAP)

Dan: vocal, banjo

Family farms are more than pieces of land – they are a precious heritage, passed from one generation to the next. Songwriter and community organizer Si Kahn has extended this principle to the salmon fishery in Bristol Bay, Alaska, now under threat from proposed mining, with the campaign Musicians United To Protect Bristol Bay (www.MusiciansUnited.info).

I remember the year that my granddaddy died
Gone, gonna rise again
And they dug his grave on the mountainside
Gone, gonna rise again
I was too young to understand
The way he felt about the land
But I could read his history in his hands
Gone, gonna rise again

It's corn in the crib and apples in the bin
Ham in the smokehouse, cotton in the gin
Cows in the barn and hogs in the lot
You know he never had a lot
But he worked like the devil for the little he got

These apple trees on the mountainside
He planted the seeds just before he died
I guess he knew he'd never see
The red fruit hanging from the tree
But he planted the seeds for his children and me

High on the ridge above the farm
I think of my people that have gone on
Like a tree that grows in the mountain ground,
The storms of life have cut 'em down
But the new wood springs
from the roots underground

3. Boll Weevil Holler

traditional, collected from Vera Ward Hall

Dan: vocal, guitar

This early blues comes through the great Alabama singer Vera Ward Hall. Although the spread of invasive species has worsened in recent years, the phenomenon is nothing new. The first boll weevils crossed from Mexico to Texas in the 1890s and quickly spread throughout the south. Attacking primarily cotton, the weevils devastated crops and contributed to the Great Depression.



The first time I saw boll weevil,
he's settin' on a square
Next time I seen him
he had his family there
He had his family there,
he had his family there
Next time I seen him
he had his family there

Tell me, Mister Boll Weevil,
what is your native home?
Way down in the bottoms
among the cotton and the corn....

Tell me, Mister Boll Weevil,
where'd you get that great long bill?
Way out in Texas,
among the western hills....

The farmer went to the merchant –
“I need some meat and meal”
“ ‘Tain't nothin' doin' old boy,
boll weevil's in your field....”

Boll weevil here,
boll weevil everywhere.
Been eatin' on my cotton and my corn,
all but the new ground square....

The first time I saw boll weevil,
he's settin' on a square
Next time I seen him
he had his family there....

4. Eighty Acre Farm

© 1985 by Doug Becken

Dan: vocal, guitar / Charlie: upright bass

I met fiddler, guitarist, songwriter and potter Doug Becken when I was an intern minister at the Nora Unitarian Universalist Church in the small Minnesota farming community of Hanska. This song echoes the stories of a great many children of farmers who can't afford to continue on the scale their parents and grandparents knew. The standard for corn was "knee high by the Fourth of July;" if crops were up to your shoulder blades it meant you were using hybrids and chemical fertilizers. "The John Deere Bandwagon" was a local television show; Doug says that every week you could watch your neighbors dance to a good polka band.

Acres of cornfields are tasseling out early
Shoulder blade high by the Fourth of July
Cornstalks the color of old John Deere tractors
Put out to the pastures and forced to retire

Used to be a man could work
an eighty acre farm
The land was like a woman
holding babies in her arms
Used to be a family could prosper on the land
Go to church on Sunday mornings,
watch The John Deere Bandwagon

My grandpa farmed 'til the day he turned eighty
His place passed down to my father and me
But my father died before he got his bills paid
Now tractors cost more than a farm used to be

Used to be a man could work
an eighty acre farm
The land was like a woman
holding babies in her arms
Used to be a government
a man could understand
Nowadays they'll write you off,
incorporate your land

There's an old two-bottom plow
rusting out in the pig-weed
Threshing machine stands in the mulberry trees
In twenty-four hours the iron man will come and
Haul all of these childhood memories away

Used to be a man could work
an eighty acre farm
The land was like a woman
holding babies in her arms
Used to be a family could make it on the land
Go to church and help the neighbors,
watch The John Deere Bandwagon

Acres of cornfields are tasseling out early
Shoulder blade high by the Fourth of July
Cornstalks the color of old John Deere tractors
Put out to the pastures and left there to die

Used to be a man could work
an eighty acre farm
The land was like a woman
holding babies in her arms

5. Doney Gal

traditional

Dan: vocal, guitar, autoharp, bass / Mara, Geeta,
George, Dick and Kathy: harmony vocals

There is so much mythology surrounding cowboys and the cowboy life that it's easy to forget these figures of legend are first and foremost expert field-hands. Depending on how you define the job, there are between fifteen and thirty thousand cowboys and cowgirls working in the United States today.

A cowboy's life is a weary thing
Rope and brand and ride and sing
Day or night in the sleet and hail
He'll stay with the dogies out on the trail

Chorus:

Rain or shine, sleet or snow
Me and my Doney Gal are bound to go
Rain or shine, sleet or snow
Me and my Doney Gal are bound to go

We're up and gone at the break of day
Driving them dogies on their lonesome way
The cowboy's work is never done
We're up and gone from sun to sun

We yell at the rain, laugh at the hail
Driving them dogies down the lonesome trail
We'll yell at the rain, sleet and snow
'Till we reach the little town of San Antonio

A cowboy's life is a weary thing
Rope and brand and ride and sing
Day or night in the sleet and hail
He'll stay with the dogies out on the trail

6. Something in the Rain

© 1992 by Tish Hinojosa

(Warner/Chappell Music, Inc.)

Dan: vocal, guitar, laúd / Mara: harmony vocal;
Charlie: upright bass

Tish Hinojosa's story of a migrant family is as beautiful as it is tragic. When I'm lucky I can get through it without crying, but I'm not that lucky very often.

Mom and Dad have worked the fields
I don't know how many years
I'm just a boy but I know how
And go to school when work is slow
We have seen our country's roads
Bakersfield to Illinois
And when troubles come our way
Oh yeah, I've seen my daddy pray

There's something wrong with little sister
I hear her crying by my side
Mama's shaking as she holds her
We try to hold her through the night
And Mom says, "Close your eyes, mi hijito"
Dream of someplace far from here
Like the pictures in your schoolbooks
Someday you can take us there"

There must be something in the rain
I'm not sure just what that means
Abuelita talks of sins of man
Of dust that's in our hands

There must be something in the rain
Well, what else could cause this pain
Those airplanes cure the plants
so things can grow
Oh no, it must be something in the rain

Little sister's gone away
Mama's working long again
And me, I think I understand
About our life, about our land
Well, talkers talk and dreamers dream
I will find a place between
I'm afraid but I believe
That we can change these hurting fields

'Cause there's something in the rain
But there's more here in our hands
Abuelita's right about the sins of man
Whose profits rape the land
And the rains are pouring down
From the growers to the towns
And until we break the killing chains
There's something in the rain

7. In the Old Days

© 1998 by Dan Schatz

Dan: vocal, 12-string guitar

I wrote this song in 1998, while living on the coast of Maine. Today the only commercial fleet in the country which fishes by sail is found in Maryland's Chesapeake Bay, not far from where I grew up.

It's good to see you here
Old friends can bring
an aging skipper cheer
I've been thinking on those times
when we sailed the Caroline
Proud and foolish, full of noise; Joe,
could it be we were just boys
In the old days?

Joe, you and I've seen days
When the water surely guessed
the plans we'd made
Said, "I see you, fisherman,
and I'll stop you if I can"
Ah, But we were young and bold
and we shouted through the cold
In the old days

In the old days, Joe, we sailed
Through fair weather and through gales
And the Caroline, she held us
Safe and never failed us
In the old days



But now fishing's not the same
With giant nets, computers –
it's a game

And the cod is almost gone;
what's left now for the young?
It was cruel, hard and rough,
but weren't we better off
In the old days?

In the old days, Joe, we sailed
Through fair weather and through gales
And the Caroline, she held us
Safe and never failed us
In the old days

But it's good to see you here
Old friends can bring
an aging skipper cheer
I've been thinking on those times
when we sailed the Caroline
Proud and foolish, full of noise; Joe,
could it be we were just boys
In the old days?

8. Poor Man

© 1968 by Frank Proffitt, Folk Legacy Records

Dan: vocal, guitar, cittern

Frank Proffitt wrote this powerful song decades before anyone became aware of global climate change and the extreme weather systems it would engender. With the increasing impacts of climate change, farms and fisheries are at ever greater risk.

I worked all through the Winter
I worked all through the Spring
Planted my corn and taters,
then it wouldn't rain
There's not a thing for a poor man in this world

I went up on the hillside
I looked at the sky
"Lord," I said,
"What makes you let it get so dry?"
There's not a thing for a poor man in this world

I fell on my knees
I thought I'd pray for rain
'Long come a great big storm,
washed everything away
There's not a thing for a poor man in this world

Hush now Honey
Don't you cry
Things are gonna get better
by and bye
There's not a thing for a poor man in this world

I worked all through the Summer
I worked all through the Fall
I spent Christmas day
in a pair of overhauls
There's not a thing for a poor man in this world

There's not a thing for a poor man in this world



9. Ain't No More Cane on the Brazos

traditional (collected from Ernest Williams)
Dan: vocal / Reggie, George, Dick: harmony
vocals

Alan Lomax collected the chain gang song "Ain't No More Cane" from inmates at the Central State Prison Farm in Sugarland, Texas in 1933. In the early part of the century, it was common for prison plantations to work prisoners "from can to can't."

Chorus:

Ain't no more cane on the Brazos
Woe, oh, oh
Done ground it all into molasses
Woe, oh, oh

Came on this river in nineteen and four
Dead man was lyin' at every row

Should've been on that river in nineteen and ten
They was treatin' the women
like they was treatin' the men

If I had a sentence like ninety and nine
There'd be no cap'n could keep me in line

10. Cluck Old Hen

traditional

Dan: vocal, autoharp

No collection of farming songs is complete without a good barnyard chicken song. This version of "Cluck Old Hen" comes from the singing of Frank Proffitt.

Cluck old hen, cluck and squall
You ain't laid an egg since way last Fall

Cluck old hen, cluck and sing
You ain't laid an egg since way last Spring

Oh I've got a good old hen
She lays eggs for the railroad men

Sometimes one, sometimes ten
She lays eggs for the railroad men

My old hen, she won't do
She lays eggs and taters too

The old hen cackled, cackled in the lot
The next time she cackles, cackle in the pot

Cluck old hen, cluck and squall
You ain't laid an egg since way last Fall

Cluck old hen, cluck and sing
You ain't laid an egg since way last Spring



11. Yea Ho, Little Fish

traditional

Dan: vocals, guitar, cittern / Mara: harmony vocal

A Portuguese fisherman's lullaby collected in Australia, "Yea Ho, Little Fish" has been around the world for centuries in different variants (including a 1937 movie version sung by Spencer Tracy.) It came to me from the singing of Ed Trickett, who learned it from Mike Cohen. At some point along the way I got into my head – quite incorrectly – that the song was Caribbean, which somewhat influenced my approach to the lyrics.

Come all you bold fishermen, listen to me
I'll sing you a song of the fish in the sea

Chorus:

Yea ho little fish, don't cry, don't cry
Yea ho little fish, you'll be whale and by

Watch out little fish, we're out after you
But you can escape away deep in the blue

You go to fish school and you learn from a book
How not to get caught on the fisherman's hook

You just swim around the fisherman's bait
And you won't end up on the fisherman's plate

Come all you bold fishermen, listen to me
I'll sing you a song of the fish in the sea

12. 1800 and Froze to Death

© 1991 by Pete Sutherland, Epact Music (BMI)

Dan: vocal, 6-string English “guitar” / Mara:
harmony vocal

The Summer of 1816 saw consistently low temperatures worldwide, the result of a massive volcanic eruption in Indonesia. Vermont Fiddler and songwriter Pete Sutherland expanded on a poem from the time, added a refrain, and set it to music. I love the song for its expression of hope, community and human goodness in the face of hardship.

In the time of the sorrowful famine year
When crops were scanty and bread was dear
On the good squire’s fertile and sheltered farm
His valley nestled secure from harm
When the summer winds blew with an icy breath
In 1800 and froze to death

And the buyers gathered with eager greed
To speculate on the poor man’s need
But the good squire said it is all in vain
No one with money may buy my grain
But they who are hungry may come and take
Their ample store for the giver’s sake

That good old man to his rest has gone
Though his fame still lingers
in the gold of the corn
For every year in the ripening grain
That grand old story is told again
How the summer winds blew with an icy breath
In 1800 and froze to death

How the summer wind blew with an icy breath
In 1800 and froze to death

13. The Kind Land

© 2000 by Gordon Bok (BMI)

Dan: vocal, 12-string guitar / Mara: harmony
vocal

When Gordon Bok dreamed this song about the displacement of farming and fishing cultures by successive waves of newcomers, it was in another language. He woke with the melody and one name, “Serinam,” which he kept. Shortly after writing it all down, he sang it for a small group of us. “Gordon,” said one of our friends, “the world needs that song.” Gordon said, “The world can have it.”

O the moon is riding high
Serinam, Serinam
O the moon is riding high, Serinam
She won’t look you in the eye,
she won’t look you in the eye
She don’t want to see you cry,
in the kind land

Now it's hard to go ashore
in the land, in the land
O it's hard to go ashore in the land
All the people on the shore,
all the people on the shore
They don't see us anymore,
in the kind land

Now the people from the town
in the land, in the land
All the people from the town in the land
They don't mean to take you down,
they don't mean to take you down
They're still looking for the ground
in the kind land

They don't know the life we keep
in the land, in the land
They don't know the life we keep in the land
They neither fish nor sow nor reap,
they neither fish nor sow nor reap
And for them the land is cheap,
in the kind land

And it's sad to see it so
in the land, in the land
Oh it's sad to see it so in the land
But there's one thing it's good to know,
there's one thing it's good to know
As we come so will we go
in the kind land



O the moon is riding high
Serinam, Serinam
O the moon is riding high, Serinam
She won't look you in the eye,
she won't look you in the eye
She don't want to make you cry,
in the kind land

14. One Last Look Behind

© 1993 by Dan Schatz

Dan: vocal, guitar, autoharp / Charlie: upright bass

*Small farmers have long been at the mercy of banks
and changing cultures.*

We loaded up the pickup
with everything would fit
And headed out on I-65
It's hard to leave a place
you've known all of your life
But some things you've got to do
to stay alive

I thought I'd live here
the rest of my days
But I'm too old to work
and the kids have gone away
There was nothing left to do
when the debt could not be paid
But pack our things, sell off the farm
and move away

My great granddaddy cleared this land
in 1865
When he came home
from the bloody Civil War
With his sons and daughters
he worked the soil
They did not have money
but they knew they were not poor

He passed the land to my grandfather,
my father down to me
And I meant to pass it to my son,
but I guess the times have changed
He left the farm, went to school
and got him a degree
I'm proud of him, you know I am,
but it hurt to see him leave

I guess I should have known
one day I'd have to go
But I never did
'til the banker told me, "No."
So we sold the farm and drove away
with one last look behind
We're headed for the city now,
a world that is not mine

I thought I'd live here
the rest of my days
But I'm too old to work
and the kids have gone away
There was nothing left to do
when the debt could not be paid
But pack our things, sell off the farm
and move away

15. Now Is the Cool of the Day

© 1971 by Jean Ritchie, Gordie Music (ASCAP)

Dan: vocal, banjo / Kim, Reggie, Mara, Geeta,
George, Dick, Kathy: harmony vocals

Jean Ritchie used the biblical image of the Earth as a garden for this powerful song about our covenant with the land, the water, the divine, and one another. Her legacy will always remain in the songs and wisdom she gave us.

My Lord, He said unto me
Do you like My garden so fair?
You may live in this garden
if you keep the grasses green
And I'll return in the cool of the day

Chorus:

Now is the cool of the day
Now is the cool of the day
This earth is a garden, the garden of my Lord
And He walks in His garden
In the cool of the day

Then my Lord, He said unto me
Do you like My garden so pure?
You may live in this garden
if you keep the waters clean
And I'll return in the cool of the day

Then my Lord, He said unto me,
Do you like My pastures so green?
You may live in this garden
if you will feed My lambs
And I'll return in the cool of the day

Then my Lord, He said unto me
Do you like My garden so free?
You may live in this garden
if you'll keep the people free
And I'll return in the cool of the day



~ Musicians ~

Dan Schatz: *vocals, guitar, banjo, Appalachian dulcimer, autoharp, bass, 12-string guitar, cittern, laúd, 6-string English “guitar”*

Kim Harris, Reggie Harris, Mara Levine, Geeta Shivde, George Stephens, Dick Swain, Kathy Westra: *harmony vocals*

Charlie Pilzer: *upright bass*

Associate Producers:

Michael and Rachel Chermiside, Susan Clark, Janis Totham Davies, Cathy Fink and Marcy Marxer, Peter Friedrichs, Mia Gardiner, Kim and Reggie Harris, Joe Hickerson, Barbara Neal and Andy Green, Larry Peers, Charlie Pilzer, Edmund Robinson, George Stephens and Kathy Westra, Mary Stromquist

Dan’s instruments:

Autoharp and Appalachian dulcimer by Keith Young (1929-2012)

Guitars, cittern and laúd by Nikos Apollonio, Rockport, Maine www.nikosapollonio.com

Banjo by Mike Ramsey, Appomattox, Virginia www.ramseybanjos.com

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For Jean.

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Cover: USDA photo by Scott Bauer - A tractor tills a field on a farm near Klingerstown, PA.

Back cover and inside farm photos by Geeta Shivde and Dan Schatz, taken at Milky Way Farm in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania (stop in to their creamery for the best ice cream ever)

Thanks to the generosity of the songwriters, a portion of the proceeds from this CD will support:

The Natural Resources Defense Council (www.nrdc.org)

Appalachian Voices (www.appvoices.org)

Musicians United To Protect Bristol Bay (www.musiciansunited.info)

The Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network (www.saafon.org)

Heifer International Disaster Rehabilitation Fund (www.heifer.org)

Young Tradition Vermont (www.youngtraditionvermont.org)

I spent the Summer of 2010 traveling, singing, and listening to news reports about the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. A few years have passed since then, but the cost of that disaster is still felt in the local fisheries, especially among families that have made their living on the water for generations and now find their entire way of life threatened.

While driving through Appalachia that June, I began to see the connections between our thirst for cheap energy, the way we treat the earth and water, and the lives of ordinary farmers, fieldworkers and fisherfolk. My song “The Promise of the Sowing” became the basis for an album dedicated to the people who give us our food, the local cultures that shape their lives, and the earth that feeds us all.

Some of these songs are traditional, some born from my own observations over the years, and others come from songwriters who care about the land, waters, and farming and fishing communities, today and in the past. On one level, many tell of hard times, with a fair degree of nostalgia for better years – but they also tell of perseverance, justice and respect. In the end, all of these songs are stories of hope.

As I recorded this album, I wondered what business I had performing the songs of people whose lives are so much more closely tied to the land than mine has ever been. Then I remembered – the people who grow and harvest our food sustain all of us. We are bound to them, body and soul, as we are bound to the Earth.

Dan Schatz



The Promise *of the* Sowing

1. The Promise of the Sowing 4:04
2. Gone Gonna Rise Again 3:31
3. Boll Weevil Holler 4:02
4. Eighty Acre Farm 4:05
5. Doney Gal 5:27
6. Something in the Rain 4:40
7. In the Old Days 4:23
8. Poor Man 5:41
9. Ain't No More Cane on the Brazos 3:24
10. Cluck Old Hen 2:20
11. Yea Ho, Little Fish 3:45
12. 1800 and Froze to Death 3:40
13. The Kind Land 5:02
14. One Last Look Behind 4:16
15. Now Is the Cool of the Day 5:22

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DAN SCHATZ

"There is a sweetness and an elegance to Dan Schatz's music, a deep reverence for tradition that reminds us why we fell in love with folk music in the first place. Listening to the quietly restrained instrumental and vocal skill with which he approaches each song, the unhurried grace and respect he bestows on every person about whom he sings, we are reminded that it truly is a gift to be simple. In this magnificent album, Dan passes that gift on to us."

—Si Kahn

