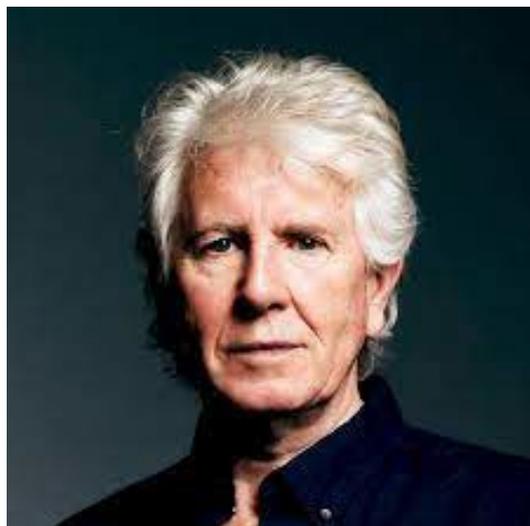


**This interview with
GRAHAM NASH
was conducted by the Library of Congress
on April 12, 2023**



Graham Nash

Library of Congress: Congratulations! “Déjà vu” by Crosby Stills, Nash and Young is being entered into the National Recording Registry.

Graham Nash: It's such an honor. You know, you never know when you're making an album, how it's gonna end up or how it's gonna be received, you know? “Déjà vu” was a very interesting album for us, the first record with Neil, of course. It's fantastic to be honored.

LC: I want to ask you about a couple of specific songs on the recently issued 50th anniversary collection. This demo of “Our House.” You're gonna recognize Ms. Joni Mitchell, she is gonna come in here in just a second. Do you remember that demo? Can you tell us a little bit about?

GN: We were at a soundcheck, I was playing in Philadelphia, I think, and Joni... You know, sound checks are just to make sure the piano's plugged in and the guitars are all plugged in and the microphones are all plugged in. And I started to play “Our House,” but Joni was sitting next to me, and so it's the only version of “Our House” with four hands.

We screwed up the song of course, you know, and, and that's why Joni is laughing. She has a delightful laugh...

LOC: Tell us about that house. Tell us a little bit about Laurel Canyon.

GN: I think she bought it from a jazz musician who had it. It was wooden, leafy, a beautiful place and very, very much Joni. I was incredibly pleased to be with Joni, you know, and spent a couple of years in that house with her.

Quite frankly the story of writing "Our House" is kind of interesting. I've told it a million times. I'd taken Joni to breakfast at a delicatessen on Ventura Boulevard in Los Angeles. It's pretty nice. It was at the tail end of winter, it was a funky day. It was cloudy, it was cold, and it was freezing and when we had finished breakfast, we were walking back to Joni's car and went past an antique store. Of course, we were looking in the window, looking at all these wonderful things that people thought were fantastic, you know, but she spotted a vase at the back of the antique store window. It was about ten inches high. It had some hand-painted flowers around one edge and, uh, it was reasonably cheap, so she bought it. And so we get into the car and of course I told you it was an awful late winter day and we go to the house in Laurel Canyon and walked through the front door and I said, "Hey Joni, why don't I light a fire?" And you put some flowers in that vase that you bought today.

Well, I'm a musician, you know, and I'm a writer. So I had an incredible opening line and I thought, "Well that's an ordinary moment, but a moment that many people would share." And so I wrote "Our House" for her.

Took me about an hour and a half, maybe. Simple song. It's, I mean, it really does sound does sound like poetry set to music.

LC: When you first played it, was it as peaceful? That's the image I get from that song. It's just this lovely image of intended peace with a couple alone in a house.

GN: That's exactly right. And when I played it for Joni, you know, obviously, I'm a writer, but nowhere as good as Joni, so I was a little hesitant to play it for her but she had kind of watched me writing it.

The thing is that I would always give her space to write, particularly at the piano. If I saw her go into that space that she goes into when she writes, I would give her space to write. But this particular day, she wasn't at her piano because she was in the garden trying to figure out what kind of weed to put, you know, into the vase. And because she wasn't at the piano, I was, and that's why I was writing "Our House."

LC: You made productive use of the time. Another song on there is of hers. Of course, that was "Woodstock." But you guys played it a little differently than she did. Tell me about how that came about.

GN: Joni's version of "Woodstock," when she wrote it is, if I can say this, is more purple. It was slower, sort of minor keys kind of thing but it has a purple color to me.

When we got back from Woodstock... and Joni, of course did not go because the media was telling people that there were 50,000, a hundred thousand, 200,000, 300,000 people gonna be there and Joni's managers, decided that she shouldn't go because she might not get out of

there, because the very next day she had to do the Dick Cavett show on television and it was a very popular show, and it was her first television show.

LC: Whose idea was it to change “Woodstock”?

GN: Steve played a lot of solos on the record and when we got to “Woodstock,” he couldn’t... We tried a couple of things and he said, “You know, this is not working. We should do something else for the solo...”

Steven Still was a brilliant record maker and has been all his life. He played most of the instruments on the first Crosby, Stills and Nash record....

There was a big difference between the first Crosby, Stills and Nash record and the “Déjà vu” record. The first record, that the three of us did was all summer and sunshine. You know, it was a great time.

The difference between the two records is that Joni and I had broken up. Steven had broken up with Judy Collins and David's girlfriend, Christine, had been killed in a car accident. And so “Déjà vu” is a little darker. And, because we added Neil, he brings a certain edge to things, you know musically and, also, with his vocals.

I happen to think that Neil Young is an incredible guitar player. And I have stood many times between Steven and Neil playing, conversing with each other on their guitars. I’ve been a lucky boy. The best seat in the house.

LC: You mentioned that this album was a little darker. Did it necessarily feel that way at the time?

GN: I said to Steven one day, I said, “You know, we’re almost done with this record but we don’t have that ‘Suite Judy Blue Eyes’.” We don’t have that song where you can guarantee that no one is gonna get up off the couch and take the needle off the record. We need an opening song like “Suite Judy Blues Eyes.” You know, it’s why we opened [the album] with it.

And he kind of understood what I meant. And I saw him thinking, and a day and a half later, he came up to me and said, “Remember what you were saying about that opening song?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “What about this?” He played “Carry On.”

Steven Stills....what a genius. Made to order.

LC: I really want to ask you about another one: “Teach Your Children,” which has such a great backstory to it. It’s based on a Diane Arbus photo with a kid and you actually met him when he was all grown up.

GN: That's true. Yes. I began collecting photographs as soon as I had the money to be able to do that, because I'm a photographer as well as being a musician. What can I say, you know?

LC: Had you seen that image first, before you started the song, or were you already writing a song like that?

GN: I was already writing the song and this is what happened: I had loaned about a hundred photographs to this gallery in California and they were doing a show. And I had there a photograph I owned of a family that provided all the armaments for World War I and World War II. And I began to realize that if we didn't teach our kids a better way of dealing with [conflict] then humanity itself is probably really screwed up. And that became "Teach Your Children."

And the reason why I personally think that it was such a big hit was we had done the track pretty simple. Me and Steven on acoustic guitars, Dallas Taylor on tambourine and we got to the solo to where the solo should be. And then Steven said, "You know, I've played a lot of solos on this record. Is there anything else we can think of?" And David said, "Garcia's in the next studio and he's been learning to play pedal steel. Why don't you play him the song. And, if he likes it, maybe you want to put pedal steel on this. And I think that Jerry Garcia's intro and the stuff he played on were perfect.

But then, Jerry said, "You know, I've made a couple of mistakes there with that note there. That's just off. Can I do another take?" And I said, "Absolutely, you can do another take, but I'm gonna tell you that I'm not gonna use it. I'm gonna use this first one because your emotion having just learned the song is perfect for the song we did."

We did take a couple of notes from his second take. But I think that, I think Jerry Garcia turned that into a big hit.

LC: Tell us about meeting the little boy in the photo holding a grenade when you met him.

GN: I told you a little earlier that I was collecting photographs and I had an auction of my photographs at Sotheby's in New York. You know, there's a night before the auction opens where all the heavy hitters get together and they have a glass of wine and they look at the stuff. So I'm doing that and this kid comes up to me and he goes, "Do you know who I am?" It's an interesting question right off the bat, you know?

And I said, "I have a pretty decent memory, but I don't think we've met." He said, "Oh, yeah, we have." I said, "Okay, what's going on here? What do you need?" He says, "I'm the boy in Central Park with the hand grenade." And I looked at him and it was him. I recognized him immediately, at once.

[I said], "You gotta tell me the story of what happened." And he said, "Well, I was, um, every Sunday, I would be able to take my toy soldiers to Central Park and I would set them

all up and have this mock battle, but on this particular Sunday, I must have upset my mother because she said, I 'can't take my soldiers, but you can take one thing.'”

And he said, “I had this hand grenade. A toy, toy hand grenade.” And he said, “That's what I want.” And he said that this little short lady dressed in black with a big camera came up to him and said, “Son, can I take your photograph?” And he goes, “Yeah, you can take my photograph.” And that's the picture.

And it was that picture that made me decide. What I told you earlier that if we didn't teach our children a better way of dealing with each other, we were screwed.

LC: Had he turned out okay?

GN: Yep. He turned out okay. Oh, yes, he was fine. Yeah, he was fine.

LC: On the album, there's a song of Crosby's and it was about him and his finding the love of the ocean and sailing...

GN: He had bought a boat with some money that he borrowed from a friend of his. The friend was Peter Tork, who was in the Monkees, who was pretty rich at that point. He lent David some money and David bought the boat and the instant he was on that boat, he knew that he had been there before, that he had learned to sail in a previous life.

And it was Déjà vu. And he had written the song “Déjà vu” and it was beautiful 'cause Crosby was an incredibly unique musician. I don't know anybody that played in tunings like he did with a slight jazz feel. I'm so sorry that he is no longer with us. It breaks my heart.

LC: What do you think you all contributed to the culture back then that nobody else was quite doing?

GN: We wanted to tell the truth. We wanted to reflect the times in which we live. I think that's the duty of every artist. You have to reflect the times in which we are living. Talk about the times in which we are living. Talk about the politics, talk about the environment. Talk about it. We always tried to tell the truth.