

# JOHNNY CASH

## YOU TRULY WERE THE MAN

I wanted to tell Johnny Cash how much he had helped me during the time that my own life was completely off the rails and made little or no sense to me at all. I had read a biography of his, I think it was called *Winners Got Scars Too*, something like that anyway, and I was inspired by the way that he had found his way back from such very dark places. I really wanted to tell him that and say thank you for giving me such hope.

Then I saw a billboard. Johnny Cash at the Olympia. He was billed to perform two nights in Dublin and straight away I knew what I was going to do.

I knocked on the stage door at the side of the theatre and the little security window opened. "There ye are Pat" said a man, the door opened and in I went. Luckily for me, a lot of people in Dublin know me and suddenly I was backstage. Because some of my friends performed regularly at the same venue I knew my way around and positioned myself at the bottom of the winding stone stairs which would lead Johnny Cash down from his dressing room to the stage. When I think of the unprofessional nature of what I was doing I still feel ashamed. Nobody with the remotest idea about how to behave back stage would dream of intercepting someone who is just about to step out and start a show. Unknown to me, he was just to embark on gig number twenty one of a twenty three night tour across Europe, was suffering from a heavy chest cold and must have been utterly exhausted...

Suddenly, there he was, coming down the stairs, black frock coat, white ruffled shirt, magnificent Mount Rushmore chiselled face, two men minding him, and Jesus, when I think of what I did, I should have been shot. I stepped out in front of him and told him how much his example had helped me and the two men moved towards me and Johnny Cash raised his hand and his face softened and he asked me my name and I told him and he said "are you coming to the show?" and I said "No... I haven't got a ticket and anyway I came in through the back". Any other world star in that situation would have had me thrown out straight away and rightly so. When I think of it now, if a complete stranger had ambushed me on my way to a stage, at the very least there would have been some very heated fuck off words spoken.

"Get Pat a chair and he can sit in the wings" said Johnny Cash and suddenly, there I was with a ringside view, the best seat in the house and all of my favourite songs coming to life before me. From time to time, when he turned away from the audience I could see him being racked by a very heavy cough.

I had been in the presence of a great man, a truly caring human being without any of the airs and graces and arrogances of so-called stars and minor talents.

Just before he stepped onto the stage, he wrote in my notebook with a flowing, generous hand – "God bless you Pat, Johnny Cash." To this day, I treasure it.

God bless you too Johnny Cash. You showed me what it really means to be a star.

I will never forget you.