



Doris Sutton (far left) holds hands with her husband, Paul, while they listen to his song, "Just a Dream Away," performed by singer Anthony Bollotta and pianist Marti Amado. Paul Sutton wrote the song 62 years ago when he was in the Navy. *Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune*

He had a dream

Original song that wooed a woman half a world away 62 years ago still wows her

By **John Wilkens**, STAFF WRITER

They dropped one atomic bomb and were getting ready to drop another, but Paul Sutton had something else on his mind.

Her name was Doris.

He sat down at a piano in the wardroom aboard the USS Wharton, anchored near Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands in the summer of 1946. He searched for the right words.

*Wherever I meet you
Whenever the day
I will wait and love you
Just a dream away*

They had met the previous fall, at an officer's club in New York City. She was pretty, a model and a poet. He was handsome, a Harvard-trained physicist. The air crackled.

World War II had just ended, and emotions were high, so it was hard to know whether what they were feeling was real or lasting. "One way to find out is to be apart for a while," Sutton said.

He went to Bikini for Operation Crossroads, to do more testing on the kinds of bombs that had leveled Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In between explosions, he dabbled at the piano.


*For I always hear you
Any time of day
Telling me, "I love you"
Just a dream away*

When he came home at the end of the summer, "Just a Dream Away" was finished. It had a line in it about dancing in Havana, because Doris had told him about a trip she'd taken to Cuba. (It had a line in it about playing tennis in Tacoma, too, but that was just poetic license.)

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◀ Paul and Doris on their wedding day in New York City in 1946. *Family photo*

 **Online:** To hear both versions of "Just a Dream Away," go to uniontrib.com/more/ww2song

► **SUTTONS**

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Time, distance
were no threats
to their love

They dated some more. They went to Jones Beach one Sunday and stopped at the Empire State Building on the way home. At the top, with lights twinkling in the distance, he proposed.

They got married Nov. 28, 1946, Thanksgiving Day. They raised two daughters, Pamela and Valerie. He did research for Corning Glass Works and Ford Aerospace. Doris published several books of poetry. Now retired, they moved to La Jolla 12 years ago.

While they were living their lives, the song pretty much sat in a file cabinet with Paul Sutton's other papers. Until a few months ago.

Valerie Sutton decided she wanted to do something for her father's 87th birthday, which is



Valerie Sutton, talking with Studio West owner Peter Dyson, paid to have her father's song recorded professionally recently as a birthday present. *Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune*

Dec. 3. She'd heard a bit about their courtship, and the song, and wondered if maybe it could be recorded professionally.

She contacted Marti Amado, a local composer and producer, who met with the Suttons and worked out an arrangement on

the piano. She introduced them to Anthony Bollotta, a North Park singer with a flair for Cole Porter-style interpretations.

New York City," she said. "People would stop and stare." She sighed. "It was such a romantic time. The war heightened everything."

Bollotta sang some more. This time, Paul nodded.

Doris said, "Anthony is a wonderful singer, and that was beautiful. But I'd like to hear Paul sing it."

So he did.

He went into the recording booth and put on headphones. He started singing, with Amado accompanying him on the piano. His words were halting, like he was a little unsure of himself, but he got stronger as he went along.

In the engineer's booth, Doris mouthed along with the words. Her eyes got shiny. "This means a lot to me," she said.

Paul finished and came over to the engineer to hear the song replayed. He held the lyrics in his hand, a typewritten sheet with his name and the copyright symbol and the date typewritten on it, right below the title: "Just a Dream Away."

He looked at his wife and said, "The dream came true."

SUNDAY
November 9, 2008



THE SAN DIEGO
UNION-TRIBUNE

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The San Diego Union-Tribune • Sunday, November 9, 2008

They all got together recently at Studio West, a recording facility in Rancho Bernardo, to bring the 62-year-old song back to life. "This is the last thing I ever expected would happen to it," Paul said.

Amado ran through the song a couple of times with Bollotta. The Suttons stood off to the side of the piano, holding hands.

"It's such a beautiful song," Bollotta said. "Thank you for letting me sing it. I'm honored to be here."

Then it was time to record. Paul, Doris and Valerie went to an adjoining room, where the recording engineer, Kellogg Boynton, was working. As Bollotta sang, Paul shook his head now and then. Something was wrong.

"It's hard when you've heard it in your head for so long, and then somebody else sings it," he said. He wasn't disappointed or angry. It was just different, a half-note here, a half-note there.

He got up from the couch to go talk with Amado about fixes. Doris sat and remembered. "Paul was the blondest man in

The Story Behind the Writing of *Just A Dream Away*
Point by Point Listing of Events by Paul Sutton

1. August 14, 1945. Japan surrenders! World War II is over.
 2. Lieut. Paul Sutton is required to remain in the Navy after the war, until June 1946 at minimum.
 3. Paul was assigned to the Inspector of Naval Material Office (INMO) at 30 Church Street, in New York City (close to what is known as Ground Zero today).
 4. Naval officers oftentimes attended the Officer's Club at Delmonico's Hotel at 59th and Park Avenue in NYC. Paul met Doris at the Officer's Club. In his own words: "She was beautiful, intelligent, serious, a good dancer, and a poet too!"
 5. Paul was a physicist, with a Bachelor's Degree from Harvard. The GI Bill made it possible for Paul to return to Graduate School at Columbia University, in the Fall of 1946.
 6. So how did Paul spend his time from June 1946 until October? At the Atom Bomb Tests at Bikini of course! Working with testing the bomb was good experience for a physicist, and helped him save money to go to Graduate School. Doris was left behind in New York, waiting for his return.
 7. So Paul applied for the Physics Post in Navy Operations Crossroads - Bombs 4 & 5. He went to Washington D.C., hand-carrying his application form from one office to another, finding Captain Chas Piggot of Ordnance Evaluation Group who needed an assistant.
 8. Paul was transferred to Operation Crossroads, Navy Department, Washington D.C. in March, 1946. Doris visited Paul in April, 1946, in Washington. Cherry blossoms are great for poetry!
 9. In May, 1946, Paul took the train to San Francisco, California. He was assigned to the U.S.S. Wharton (AP-7), which docked at Pearl Harbor May 5-12th. It was a busy nine days while at Pearl Harbor, for Paul, and on the last day, Paul waited in line for four hours to put a telephone call through to Doris. The U.S.S. Wharton left for Bikini the next day.
 10. The U.S.S. Wharton anchored in the center of Bikini Lagoon. Paul and the crew checked all 76 target ships to see that the exposure plan was followed.
 11. Bomb No. 4 was tested on July 1st, 1946. It was labelled TEST ABLE.
 12. The report on the Test results were prepared. The exposure plan for the next bomb was then checked. A number of the target ships were moved or changed.
 13. The grand piano in the U.S.S. Wharton wardroom looked inviting to Paul!
 14. In-between Bomb Tests No. 4 and 5, Paul wrote a Love song and lyrics for Doris. The composition was developed in mid-July, 1946. She was "Just a Dream Away"!
 15. Bomb No. 5 was tested on July 25, 1946. It was labelled TEST BAKER.
 16. The report on the Test results were prepared.
 17. Paul returned to Washington D.C. and resigned from active duty on October 25, 1946.
 18. Doris and Paul went to Jones Beach on a Sunday in September. On the way back, they went to the Empire State Building and Paul finally proposed at the top of the Empire State Building, while looking at the distant twinkie.
- As told by Paul Sutton**
October 7, 2008
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