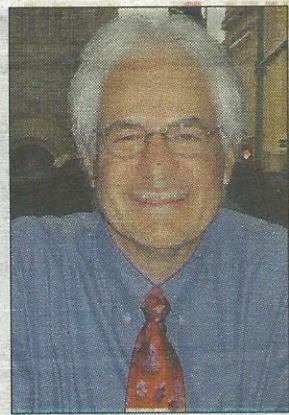




COURTESY PHOTO



LINDA LAMM ENGLISH

**By day, Jim Newsom can be found in shirt and tie at Southern Bank on Boush Street in Norfolk. By night, he can be found on stage with Holly Bishop, performing as Mountaintide.**

# ONE HAPPY GUY (and you can take that to the bank)

By Linda Lamm English  
Correspondent

It happened at the Naro Expanded Cinema on Colley Avenue.

It's where Jim Newsom, banker, musician and singer/songwriter, got inspired. He and his wife Gerri had just watched "Inside Llewyn Davis," a movie about a young man trying to make it as an entertainer in New York.

Newsom could empathize. Like Davis, he had gone to New York with his guitar. Unlike Davis, he knew no one there.

"I played on street corners in Greenwich Village and starved for a while. I didn't even make it a year. I came home nine months later, hungry and cold," he said.

When the Newsoms came out of the theater that night, he told his wife he wanted to get back to just him and his guitar, the format that first established him in Hampton Roads.

He started out singing folk songs and his own music at events and venues in the 1980s. Then he discovered "it was more fun to play with others" and formed various jazz combos. But for a while, he had felt the need to musically morph into something different while keeping his day job at Southern Bank.

As he mulled over what that might be, he went to an open



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**Jim Newsom and Holly Bishop collaborated on a recently released CD, "Dancing in the Sun," an acoustic presentation of original songs in a folksy style.**

mic night where people have the opportunity to showcase their talents. Holly Bishop of Norfolk was there with her fiddle.

"You want to sit in with me?" she asked him. "I sing, too." He did and they clicked.

Since then, Newsom and Bishop have found harmony performing as a duo called "Mountaintide." They collaborated on a recently released CD, "Dancing in the Sun," an acoustic presentation of original songs in a folksy style.

"I always said I'd never have a girl in the band, because they can be divas," Newsom said.

"But Holly is not a diva, and she can sing and play. This feels like a natural evolution."

"I was born with the musical gene," he said, in Chattanooga, Tenn. It was passed down from his mother, who played the piano, and his uncle, Portsmouth's Tommy Newsom, who played with the Tonight Show band for 30 years.

"My parents say that when I was a toddler, I played songs all day long on my little record player and danced."

While his father was in seminary school at Yale University in Connecticut, the family frequented Sally's Pizzeria.

There, the 4-year-old played his favorite tune on the juke box, "The Roving Kind" by Guy Mitchell, over and over.

When it was time for the Newsoms to relocate, a waitress pulled out the 78 record and gave it to the little boy as a parting gift. He still has it.

Newsom is self-taught on the piano, flute and guitar. His sisters took piano lessons, but he preferred playing sports throughout his years in the Suffolk public school system. Still, he could pick out what he heard them play from their practice books.

He bought a flute for \$25 from a classmate at Suffolk High School, and mastered it by studying a finger chart while listening to jazz legend Herbie Mann's recordings. He taught himself guitar in the same fashion, playing along to Bob Dylan.

He now owns five guitars, two flutes and his parents' piano. Even so, "it's all about the song" for him, and he has written many.

Sometimes the words come first, sometimes the melody does. Either way, "It's hard for me to write a song if I don't have something to say," he said.

But, when he does, "Bingo, bango, there it is!"

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