



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Tony Bennett**

## Tony Bennett

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It's been said that death is nature's way of telling us to slow down. Maybe so, but I look upon nature as not advising us to slow down, but slowing us down without prior notice...permanently.

One of the finest singers of his generation, Tony Bennet, beat this portent for quite some time. While suffering from inevitable old age rusting, as well as Alzheimer's for a number of years, Tony's pipes never rusted. Sure, they weren't as strong and forceful as in his youth. But his voice and the beautiful sound of his pipes never wavered. Along with his warm graciousness, he never failed to resonate joy to those who listened to him. And could he ever sing!

Tony finally slowed down for-good on July 21, 2023. At 96, he was two weeks short of his birthday.

I have a special place in my heart for Tony Bennett. Upon learning about his death, so many treasured memories came back to me. I would like to share some of them with you.

Like many admirers of Tony Bennett, I associate him with the song "I Left My Heart in San Francisco." From as far back as 1962, every time I heard the song, I recalled many fine times I had in association with his singing it (I still do).

Quite a number of these memories are about San Francisco itself. During each visit to this city by the bay, I make it a point to cycle the Bay Bridge and to visit the Buena Vista Café, shown below.



**Bridge by the Bay.**



**Café by the Bay.**

"I Left My Heart in San Francisco" was around for years before Tony recorded it. He made it famous, put it on the singles best-selling records for a long time. My first recollection of his rendition came in the winter of 1962-1963. I was attending the US Navy Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Newport, Rhode Island. For the first few weeks, OCS members were restricted to the base without liberty. Eventually, we were granted some time-off: two nights on Fridays and Saturdays.

After weeks of living in WWII barracks and putting up with rigid Navy nothingness during rare free times, our first liberty was celebrated by heading to downtown Newport. We OCS rookies had heard about several local watering holes; places where OCS men had been frequenting for years.

So did the local females. They knew our habits and, like us, were looking for company. One bar in particular had a large dance floor, dimmed lighting, and a juke box where patrons could play the latest tunes.

That first night of liberty, I met a lovely woman about the same age as I. Maybe a bit younger, but I was only 23 myself. She lived in Fall River, Massachusetts, about twenty miles from downtown Newport. She later told me that she and her friends came to this bistro when the OCS boys were on liberty.

I recall my first dance with her. It was to “I Left My Heart in San Francisco.”

Since my childhood, with the tutelage of my grandmom and mom, I have loved to dance. It is the pleasure of two people in synchronization with each other, as their intertwined bodies synchronize themselves with the music.

The music. It makes for either a pleasant or unpleasant glide around the dance floor. Tony’s singing of that song made my first dance with this girl an unforgettable sashay.

That dance in 1962 will stay with me until nature decides my time is up. So will the memory of my lovely dancing partner, who began coming each week-end to this bistro for us to dance. We danced to other songs, of course. But Tony’s tune became one in which she and I made sure we danced with no one else.

She was a great dancer. Across the dance floor we effortlessly glided to the song. I, in my service dress blues. She, in her cocktail dress. It was a special time in more ways than just a few hours of liberation from a Navy base. Tony helped us share a liberty, if only for a few moments:



The loveliness of Paris seems somehow sadly gay  
 The glory that was Rome is of another day  
 I've been terribly alone and forgotten in Manhattan  
 I'm going home to my city by the Bay  
 I left my heart in San Francisco  
 High on a hill, it calls to me  
 To be where little cable cars climb halfway to the stars  
 The morning fog may chill the air, I don't care  
 My love waits there in San Francisco  
 Above the blue and windy sea  
 When I come home to you, San Francisco  
 Your golden sun will shine for me  
 When I come home to you, San Francisco  
 Your golden sun will shine for me



The final week of OCS, when candidates learned if they were soon to be US Navy officers, was topped-off with a grand dinner and dance at the Newport Naval Base. A large space in one of the buildings was outfitted and decorated for successful OCS graduates to commemorate their new status.

I wanted this woman to share this evening with me, to join in my celebration. I wanted us to enjoy a night of dancing and being with each other. I invited her to the celebration. She came.

Each time I hear “I Left My Heart in San Francisco,” I think of the café by the Bay, of the bridge by the Bay. But the first memory that comes to mind is dancing in a Newport nightclub with a stunning woman, a gorgeous dancer.

I’ve read that the death of a beloved person or pet takes a little bit out of the life of those who are still around. I don’t look at death that way. Tony Bennett is gone. But his death did not take anything away from me. Like other cherished ones who have passed, Tony’s death brought forth only fond memories. This week, I have been reminiscing about the man, the song he made famous, and my dances to his music.