

Pride in Detroit.

COMPLICATIONS FROM Covid-19 killed him in 2020. Now that he's passed, he can kiss an angel every morning if he wants. Truth be told, though, the corona virus disease was one of the least complicated things in his life.

Fans and peers lauded and laureled him: Grand Ole Opry member, country music hall of fame lifetime achievement, best country performance, best gospel performance, male vocalist of the year, entertainer of the year, favorite country artist, favorite country album, best, best, best, award, award award. Fifty-two top ten hits over 21 years; in the course of his career, over 30 reached number one. There was a little bit of Hank in him, Hank Williams that is, but you wouldn't know it to look at him.

Arlington, Texas: he sang the national anthem before the final game of baseball's 2010 World Series. Before the final game of the 1980 World Series, he sang it in the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia. He sang it in Houston, Texas before football's Super Bowl VII in 1974. He sang it at Texas Rangers games; he was one of the team's owners. The words to the anthem never changed; how much has, really? Has any song been more spangled with stars and pride? Has the nation ever fully lived up to it?

What a welcome Detroit gave him; his first big show! It was late summer, 1966 at "The Old Red Barn," Olympia Stadium, on Grand River Avenue. Detroit's country music scene had never seen anyone like him. Olympia Stadium was home ice for the Detroit Red Wings, and you'd expect to see him at a hockey game about as much as you

would at a country-western concert - that is, you wouldn't expect to see him at all, at either one. But there he was.

Olympia held 10,000 fans of "America's music," whatever that was supposed to look like. They'd heard him on the radio, "Just Between You and Me." The rich baritone twinging with a hint of twang. They were hyped to see him sing live! His name was announced; the fans applauded; he walked on stage - *and the applause stopped*. The audience sat stunned. "'Friends," he said, "I realize it's a little unique, me coming out here."

And here, our fixation with pigmentation results in negative images, results in contrasts between expectation and reality that hurt to understand:

Home folks think I'm big in DEE-troit city.

From the letters that I write they think I'm fine

If only they could read between the lines.

Early on, his recording company, RCA, didn't let him record "Green, Green Grass of Home." They were afraid of the audience reaction if he were to sing about love with a blonde-haired woman.

Why don't you look like you're supposed to? Why don't you sound the way you're supposed to sound?

He was called colored, Negro, black, African-American, Black, and nigger - the last being the most taboo word in America. His response? "What we call it, that's about the only thing that's changed."

Written by K.G. Jones.

© 2021. For copyright permission, go to codelldetroitfiction.com/about

"Friends, I realize it's a little unique, me coming out here – with a permanent suntan – to sing country and western to you."

BIG applause! For the white-washing joke.

"But that's the way it is. I ain't got time to talk about pigmentation all night."

Some fans denied that the voice could be his. Fifty-four years later, people with their heads stuck in the same sand denied Covid-19, even after it killed Charley Pride.

#