

Origins: Jesus Was a Teenager, Too

*from Bill Logan
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This story is a bit long but it is accurate about the origin of the song by Jesse Winchester. Before the start of the fall semester of 1965, I (not me, actually Fletcher Clark) had never visited the campus of Williams College, my new home for most of the next four years. My dad had taken time out from a medical convention in NYC to drive up for a look-see in the January before my admission - he pronounced it suitable. His plan was for me to drive my stuff there in his '64 Mercury Comet sedan. I would be accompanied as co-pilot by a high school friend whom I would drop off at Princeton on the way. From there I would pick up an old family friend in Orange, NJ (downstate, charming, with rolling hills), who would later drive herself back to Texas after we dropped me off. Going up the NY Thruway through Albany, we stopped off for a pre-arranged visit with one of my to-be roommates and his family. North to Troy and then east on Rte. 2 (The Mohawk Trail), I was beginning to realize how rural New England really was. We arrived and found our way to my dorm assignment, a 2nd story 3-room "suite" in an 1882 structure. There I met my other roommate and his family, who had just arrived from Westchester Co., NY. It didn't take long to unload my stuff so Marge could hit the road back to New Jersey, and it certainly did not take long to make my bed and arrange my things. I then wandered over to Baxter Hall, the student union, and eventually found my way to the basement "Rathskellar", where I found a simple upright piano. Playing grounded me some. A fellow walked in and listened, and after introductions, suggested he go grab a guitar so we could jam. I said I would do the same, explaining that I was a total hack on piano. When I came back with my beloved Gibson 225 and my Fender Deluxe amp, he was already there with two other guys - his bass player and drummer. And with that we started playing all kinds of blues, rock & roll, and R & B. We scheduled another get-together for a later date, and by then I had recruited one of my freshman dorm mates to bring his Wurlitzer electric piano. (This would be my life-time friend Dr. Fred Bashour who later become one of the top classical recording engineers world-wide.) I should say at this point that our leader was Jimmy Winchester, who would later use his middle name Jesse for his long and successful career as a singer-songwriter. But at the time he was just Jim, just back from his junior year abroad in Hamburg ('64-'65), later to finish his summa cum laude degree in German. His gentle Mississippi Valley accent gave a sonority to the R&B, and he was a damn good guitar player. Over the course of that school year, we played scores of college and frat party gigs. Winchester wanted to name the band 'Roget and the Thesauruses', but we all resisted until we finally settled on 'Roget & the Mojo Teeth'. Jim introduced me to another senior by the name of John Sundstrom, who conscripted me into several of the theatre productions in which he was involved (and forever corrupted me with my first joint). Together, they had written this faux doo-whop song, "Jesus Christ Was a Teenager, Too", for which John would take the mic for a wry recitative in the back half. It stuck with me, and years later, when my college music partner (Jack Jacobs) and I formed Balcones Fault in Austin, I did it one night at the Split Rail Inn, finding to my surprise that when I began the sermonic portion, I was spontaneously channeling some odd combination of Elmer Gantry and Prof. Harold Hill. (A tearful and very inebriated young coed wailed that I shouldn't be talking about Jesus like that - in

an accent I could never hope to replicate.) So over the years, it became a mainstay - and somewhat of a cheap shot. I suppose it could be construed as blasphemy, but although the goal was comedic, I realized that all my improvised utterances (never the same) were sincere and not spoken sarcastically. There is a much longer tale involving my later reunion with Jesse Winchester, since we parted ways after his graduation in 1966. But for this chapter, I wanted to present the backstory of the writers of "Jesus Christ Was a Teenager, Too", Jimmy Winchester and John Sundstrom.

Jesse singing Jesus Christ Was A Teenager Too:
www.jessewinchester.com/albums/other_songs/Jesus.mp3

Jesus doh Jesus doh Jesus..
Jesus Christ was a teenager too
And had problems growing up, just like me and you
Oh Jesus Christ was a teenager too

He bopped on down to pick up Mary Magdalene
And you know that chick was Jesus' own teenage queen
Oh Jesus Christ was a teenager too
Just like me and just like you

He worked part time in a carpenter's shop
To earn some dinari to take his girl out to the hop
He never had any fun 'cause see his social life was a mess
I have to be about my father's business

So you went into the desert, kid, and he hung out for 40 days
And he confronted the establishment and he won only because he prayed
Oh Jesus Christ, the man was a teenager too
And just like mad and just like you

Amen

Jimmy Winchester and John Sundstrom

<https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=152721> for original post

This clip is from the Balcones Fault Austin City Limits appearance near the beginning of its second season.

https://youtu.be/H0mX5_GgABs