

# Hear My Soul Sing



**Novel**  
**Judy K Johnson**

Hear My Soul Sing  
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*This book is dedicated to  
my beloved grandson, Blake,  
who with his kind and gentle nature  
awoke within me  
a profound awareness of empathy  
and the multiple blessings it bestows  
upon all those who embrace it  
especially in the communities of those  
with special needs.*

## *Author's Note*

***Warning: Proceed carefully, reading with cautious hope.***

This novel's authentic description of a devastating birth reveals an innocent newborn's shocking birth defects to his carefree, unprepared family. This irreversible disaster creates an immediate crisis within his guilt-ridden family, presenting relentless challenges in tending to his ongoing special needs. Future hopes, dreams and passions of each family member quickly vanish, silently mourned with great guilt since this baby may never even appear to be normal.

The author carefully explores in depth the overwhelming effects this baby boy's birth has upon his sister—effects requiring decades of self struggle to reverse the emotional scars of profound denial, guilt, loss of self worth, and even issues of over achievement and unfocused hidden anger. Will she eventually have to leave home in order to find her own life?

The reader will see the sister be immensely challenged to define herself throughout her youth. After years of struggle, her diligent efforts enlighten her to possibilities of rich, abundant blessings she


once considered unobtainable. Such blessings gradually reveal themselves with her discovery and development of empathy for those beautiful souls who, from the moment of birth, are burdened with continual crisis from profound birth defects. The monumental discovery of this empathy magically heals her own distressed soul.

The format of this novel is a combination of the sister's own thoughts in her "Notes-To-Self" journal along with historically accurate details of her family's experiences that range in time from the Woodstock Music Festival held in Bethel, New York to the Eagles' "Hell Freezes Over" concert in Austin, Texas near the end of the twentieth century. At each stage of the journey, family members are defined by popular music that expresses their emotions and encourages family unity. That music, originally offering the sister a refuge from her brother's issues, eventually becomes her passion. She finds herself drawn toward to an unusual career in which she finds unlimited opportunities to instill within others the very empathy that awakened and restored her own troubled soul.

When readers finish this story, they are urged to explore the section, "*How the Writing of This Book Evolved*," which authenticates the reality of portrayed events or issues and provides references for those interested in further study. Also included are internet references for musical performances and medical data. These biographical details are purposely located at the back of the book without references within the body of the story so that the flow of the story proceeds uninterrupted.

Unruled Composition Book

Stella<sup>\*</sup> Harmony Walker

Notes To Self 



# 1



-Recalling November, 1974-

Once again, my most dreaded, lifelong night terror replays in excruciating detail as shivering-cold, paralyzing fear engulfs me. I'm just four years old, hardly capable of rational understanding but I'm engulfed in horrifying panic. My rapid heartbeat audibly pounds in my chest as I stand waiting at the open door of my parent's familiar but dark bedroom.

I'm obsessing that a vaguely recognizable, ghostly figure might silently float from out of the dark, corner shadows and reach toward me through what appears to be



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confining, vertical bars, moaning sadly as it struggles then slowly dissolves. I remain frozen at the open door even when I hear Mother softly call out my name. "Stella."

Carelessly dangling my "Baby Brother Tender Love" doll by its outreached arm, I have no option except to irreversibly step over the threshold into this dimly lit, curtain-pulled, disturbingly quiet bedroom while at the same time instantly sensing my dear, distraught Mother's overwhelming heartache and my too-quiet and too-sad Daddy's inability to fix it.

Afraid of the icy, unavoidable, threatening tension smothering this once peaceful, inviting bedroom, I now stand frozen at the foot of the very bed that has often served as my delightful, princess palace complete with fluffy, puffy, pillow clouds. It now seems transformed into a dark, forbidden island with horrifying monsters possibly hiding under mountains of smothering blankets that surround Mother and a tiny bundle she holds so lovingly close. I remain puzzled as Daddy stands with his back toward me, his head bent over as if broken, hiding an unfamiliar,

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distant, distraught expression on his face. I'm confused. Daddy has always been able to fix everything.

Mother beckons me once again to approach—her soft, trembling voice pinched with pain. I turn to Daddy but his head remains hanging, his face hidden; it's my first-ever encounter with grief. No previous memory from my young life has ever captured a comparable dread to provide me with an appropriate reaction. So when Mother turns red, swollen eyes toward me and pleads a third time for my approach, I, slowly, slowly, slowly place one foot slightly ahead of the other until I eventually reach her side of the enormous bed and timidly touch her pale, quivering, outstretched fingers. Intimidated, I notice once again the baby-blanket-wrapped bundle Mother dearly holds so tight against her shoulder.

"Is this my new baby brother?" I softly, curiously whisper my thoughts as some strange fear grips my pounding heart. I've been silently, internally fearful ever since Mother announced one day that our baby that she's been expecting forever was finally ready to be born. As we drove to the hospital, Mother "promised" I would get to see

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our baby that very day. Instead, Daddy had been rushed from the waiting room to be with Mother, and I had spent a tedious amount of time looking at stacks of picture books with an overly friendly, hospital volunteer.

That was the day (Halloween, actually) that Daddy became forever, too sad. And that was the day that I first became aware that certain things would never again happen as Mother promised. Daddy eventually took me home without seeing either the baby or Mother. Our house has become way too dark and quiet ever since, as if stalling for some dreadful family revelation.

Today, Mother finally comes home but hurries past me as she quickly retreats to her bedroom with a tiny, blue-striped, blanket-wrapped bundle that I'm convinced must certainly be the new baby. Feeling all alone, I begin to wonder if I've somehow done something terribly wrong. Now, finally, Mother has summoned me to see my new baby brother. With her chin quivering, she softly whispers that he's a sweet, precious, baby boy and that I should hold him. She says I can help her take good care of our baby.

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Mother tries to smile as she pats the pillow beside her coaxing me up onto her bed. Her next world-shattering words endlessly swirl about in my head, words that I don't understand and won't for a long, long, long time. As Mother tries to somehow explain the many unexpected health issues about him—clearly beyond my experience or imagination—I've still yet to see my new baby brother concealed in his baby blanket.

Mother warns me that we must always be careful when we touch my baby brother as she starts to describe his birth defects. The bandages on his left arm and hand protect swollen sores. His left hand has an index finger and thumb but his three other fingers are just tiny irregular nubs. His left leg, also bandaged, has more sores and a crooked, turned-in foot. His tiny left eye is angled sideways and covered with scar tissue.

Then, Mother continues to remind me that we still all need to love him very much and take very good care of him. She promises everything would get better soon.

None of this confusing explanation makes any sense at

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all. Without completely comprehending such strange, unthinkable, yet unobserved details, I curiously watch as Mother slowly, carefully eases that soft, blue-striped baby blanket away from the baby's face. Smiling hopefully as I first catch glimpse of a soft mound of brown, curly hair on top of his head, I spontaneously giggle, excited about next seeing our baby's long, dark, blinking eye lashes as the blanket slides slowly downward.

Then, letting out a horrified gasp, I jerk backwards, frozen silent, staring at that tiny, scar-covered, odd-shaped, tear-filled eye as this baby now lets out a feeble cry. Covering most of that side of his face are red zigzag, swollen sores.

As the blanket loosens, he squirms, jerking his arms rapidly about. In frantic disbelief, I notice the baby's bandaged arm as his tiny thumb and single finger reach out towards me. That finger actually scratches my shoulder! When the blanket finally falls open, I'm additionally horrified to see his shriveled, bandaged leg with his bare foot hanging loosely down at an impossible angle. I realize with peaked

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apprehension that all these bandages probably conceal lots of red zigzag, swollen sores.

"This is my baby brother?" Frightened and bewildered, I shriek out loud, louder even than the hungry, pleading cries of this grotesque, screaming baby! My brother? Mother tries to calm me suggesting that my baby brother is merely hungry and just simply needs to be fed.

I quickly glance at Daddy, and even though he still hangs his head, I see defeated tears flowing down his cheeks. My next glance at Mother reveals a similar wide trail of tears also descending her soft, pale cheeks. I'm wondering if I've somehow done something terribly wrong to cause all of this heartache for us all.

Not waiting for any further explanation, I leap from Mother's bed. My feet barely touch the floor as I flee this scene of life-changing tragedy. Without any doubt, I know conclusively that my perfect, joyful life will never be the same again, ever! I run up the hallway toward the kitchen and scurry into Mother's large, well-stocked pantry closet. Slamming the door shut behind me I hide in a far corner

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underneath the bottom shelf in total darkness. Venting my rage toward my new "Baby Brother Tender Love" doll (that I'd so lovingly fed and practiced changing diapers on), I shove it down into the empty, red gingham lined picnic basket stored in the opposite corner.

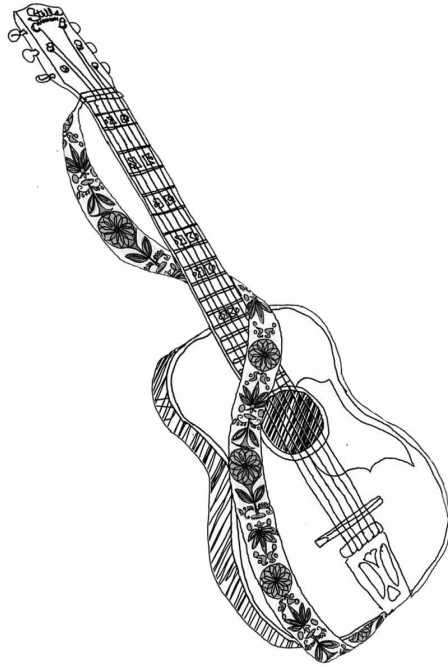
My most dreaded, lifelong night terror slowly drags on. I'm afraid to leave my hideout. Squatting and tightly hugging my own knees, I peer into dark corners and imagine hideous monsters with huge red sores screaming as they surround me. Startled, I'm aware they never intend to leave me alone ever again.

I can barely hear the distant, familiar, softly strummed chords of Daddy's guitar sweetly soothing me as I weep. Such magical melodies Daddy always played just for Mother and me to express his special love. My worries intensify as it occurs to me—that, apparently, I'm not now included because Daddy's not singing to me but to that baby. I'm too young to feel so brokenhearted.

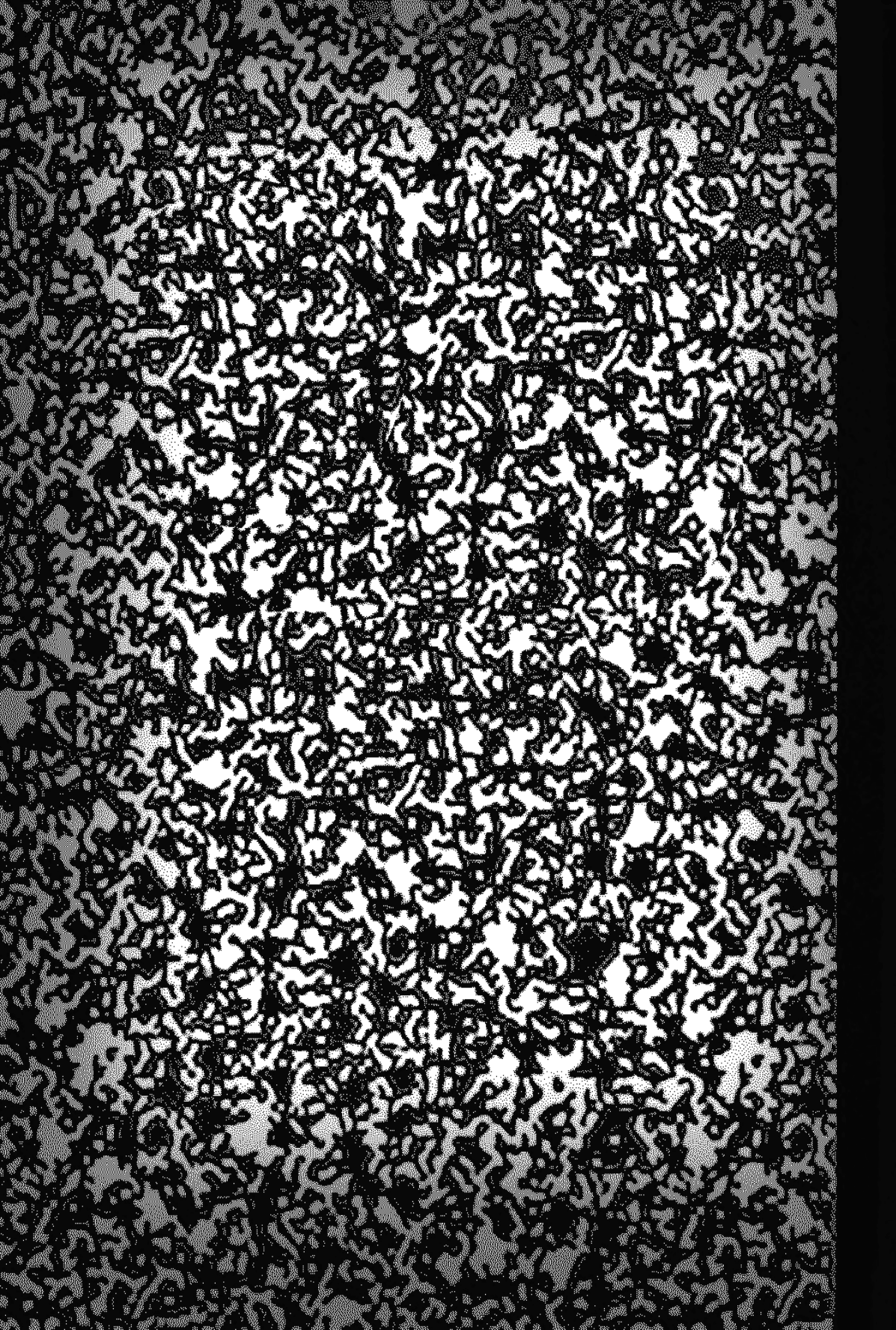
I'm lost in a separate, dark world realizing that this new, unfamiliar sensation of feeling alone may now be a

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permanent part of my life. Still crouched in the pantry, I tragically wonder what I've done so terribly wrong to cause this abandonment. A terrifying sensation of smothering distress engulfs me when I hear the lonely, distant chords of Daddy's acoustic guitar as he sadly sings "Bridge Over Troubled Water" in his own improvised minor key.







# 2



Site of Woodstock Music Festival  
Hurd Road off Hwy NY-17B  
Bethel, New York  
(43 miles southwest of Woodstock, New York)

~August, 1969~

A brand new H929 Stella Harmony acoustic guitar slung over his right shoulder bumped against Harold's back on each stride as he trudged along the roadway. The webbed double-strap of a tightly packed sea bag slung over his left shoulder tugged heavily downward. Each step aggravated his blistered feet; his black leather jump boots, regular issue to all sailors assigned to Damage Control Division, weren't designed for hiking. In stark contrast, his well-worn, Navy-issued, bell-bottom, denim dungarees with heptagonal "patch" pockets sewn on the front and back of the pant legs felt soft and comfortable, as did his customary bleached-white, short-sleeved t-shirt, which, however, did little to cushion his back and shoulders.

Ironically, Harold's last name, Walker, was visibly stenciled in white letters just above his dungarees back pocket (also required by Naval uniform protocol). The rest of his working uniform, which consisted of a blue chambray shirt with his name also stenciled in black above the right breast pocket, a white so-called "Dixie cup" hat, and a set of Ceremonial Enlisted

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Man's Full Dress Whites was tightly rolled and tightly packed along with the rest of his belongings in his sea bag. Harold expected that he would get lots of use out of his three sets of working uniforms but had no reason to imagine he would ever wear his Full Dress Whites ever again.

He was hitchhiking south along the New York State Thruway. He had heard news at a roadside cafe that morning that the Apollo 11 astronauts had landed on the moon. Ironically, at the same time men were walking on the moon, Harold Walker was striding toward Max Yasgur's 600-acre dairy farm in the Catskills near the hamlet of White Lake close to Bethel, New York. His destination was the site of the self-proclaimed musical lifestyle experience of all time. He wasn't too sure he could even get there on time.

Recently honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy, Harold first heard about the festival in mid-April when his ship entered radio range on its final return trip, an Atlantic cruise to Puerto Rico. His ship, the USS Essex, an aircraft carrier, moored at Boston Naval Yard on June 30<sup>th</sup>, and his official naval tour of duty ended ten days later. Disillusioned by intense radio broadcasts of antiwar sentiment airing almost everywhere, he decided to hitchhike toward the New York countryside in hopes of finding a small town where he might hang out temporarily and consider his future. Heading west on US Hwy 90, the Massachusetts Turnpike, his life underwent a rapid transition from the familiar sailor's lifestyle on the high seas to an unfamiliar hitchhiker's lifestyle on the highways.

Pausing to rest up a few days in Springfield, he noticed a simple poster featuring a single white dove perched on a guitar neck against a bright red background that promised "Three Days of Peace and Music." Never before had Harold felt so impetuous, felt such a strong calling to go a certain direction in life. He had only enlisted in the Navy when his draft number came up during the Vietnam War. Now this long, tedious highway slowly unfolding ahead of him seemed to be the beginning of a promising new life.

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He asked locals for directions to a good music store and was directed to Falcetti Music where he met owner, Sam Falcetti.

Long hours at sea had given Harold plenty of time to learn chords on a friend's beat-up guitar. He had a gift for remembering lyrics, so sailor buddies often requested popular folk songs. Now, after purchasing the best guitar he could afford for \$37.50, he was left with precious little discharge pay in his small ditty bag which he shoved deep into his sea bag. As Harold turned to leave the music store, Sam offered him a great discount on a guitar case. Politely declining, he started out the door just as Sam tossed him a psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap and remarked, "You'll need this if you plan to carry your guitar all the way to the Woodstock Music Festival."

"Sorry, sir, no thanks, I'm kind of low on funds," Harold asserted.

"On the house for Vets," Sam called out before Harold could turn down his gift. He reached out and shook Harold's hand. "Hope you catch a ride."

Harold was unaware that literally hundreds of thousands of America's youth were answering the same compelling call to the Woodstock Music Festival. It appeared his entire generation was on a pilgrimage, impulsively drawn to this musical awakening like bees urgently drawn to enticing flowers. This comparison proved ironic days later as actual flower-filled meadows at the festival turned to puddles and mud due to an immense deluge of rain.

At sunrise, August 15<sup>th</sup>, with a brilliant horizon to his left, Harold, headed south on the New York State Thruway on his slow, steady journey. He was elated when, just moments later, a dusty rattle-trap 18-wheeler bounced to a stop, air brakes hissing. A dusty, grimy trucker, who identified the "Walker"-stenciled dungarees as part of a sailor's attire, offered a ride that would actually take him all the way to his music festival destination.

"We Vets need to stick together. Now-a-days, people blame us for the whole rotten Vietnam War. Those lazy draft-dodgers pretend they're celebrities instead of the dirty, rotten scum they really are!" declared the

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trucker, an ex-marine with a defensive attitude.

Twelve hours later, Harold was dropped off in the middle of a twenty-mile long traffic jam with abandoned cars blocking the roads. Harold had never seen anything like it. At the last minute, noticing rain beginning to spatter his windshield and knowing that Harold carried only minimal gear, the frustrated yet sympathetic trucker reached behind his cab seat to retrieve a folded tarp that he tossed down to Harold. Amazed at the trucker's compassionate gesture, Harold snapped to attention and sharply saluted him before retrieving the tarp lying near his feet.

Harold could hear distant shouts from Richie Havens on stage greeting the crowd by calling out, "We've finally made it!" Returning to the stage for his seventh and final encore, Havens loudly belted out the words of "Freedom," a new song he made up on the spot while on-stage, which established a key theme for the festival and would eventually become his signature tune. Throngs of relentless people embraced the lyrics which they hollered back at the distant stage. That Friday night as Harold approached the flimsy Yasgur Dairy Farm pasture fences, he discovered the ticket barriers had been demolished by masses of festivalgoers thronging onto the grounds. Loudspeakers began proclaiming at that moment that the concert had been declared free admission.

Later, it was reported that 186,000 tickets had been sold, but actual attendance was nearly half a million. The festival's chief medical officer, Dr. William Abruzzi, sincerely commented to *Rolling Stone* magazine, "These people are really beautiful. There has been no violence whatsoever, which is really remarkable for a crowd of this size." Only about 75 people in the area were arrested for possessing narcotics, although security didn't stop anyone from using marijuana. However, hundreds were treated for badly manufactured LSD.

Harold meandered around the grounds noticing what he estimated to be

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thousands of tents, campers, and makeshift lean-to shacks made of materials found on hand like trees, wood, ropes, sheets, and blankets. One huge teepee constructed around the trunk of a towering elm tree had a bonfire inside. Harold could see smoke escaping a hole at the top. There was, however, still another large open gap on the back edge of the teepee. By offering his tarp and his assistance in completing the makeshift structure, Harold secured himself a spot in the shared shelter and was thankful that his donation now afforded him a place to sleep and stow away his sea bag even though he planned to spend only a minimal time away from festival performances.

Someone working on the teepee suggested that they all go over to the Hog Farm's free kitchen, which was set up next to several hippie-painted peace sign buses. The Hog Farm, a commune that originated in California, where members received free rent for tending swine for their handicapped landlord, was currently known for busing across America and setting up music stages for mainstream rock artists. At Woodstock, they were recruited to build fire pits and trails on the grounds. They also used non-intrusive, peaceful tactics to keep security, calling themselves the "Please Force."

As Harold stood in the slow-moving free food line, he casually gazed at the horizontal, patchwork rows of alternating turquoise, yellow, and mint-green fabric on a flashy, ankle-length, bohemian skirt belonging to a talkative girl behind the counter. Instantly fascinated by the embroidered marching elephants with upright trunks on the bottom stripe, Harold let his gaze travel upward to focus on a mint-green layer (about hip high) embellished with beaded cascading daisies in various shades of vivid pink and dazzling orange. He shivered spontaneously when he realized that her hand-beaded daisies just happened to match his guitar strap. As his gaze continued to move upward, he especially noticed intricate purple amethyst-chip beads stitched along the drawstring neckline of her simple, white cotton peasant blouse, which she wore down off her exquisite bare shoulders in the kitchen heat. She handed

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out steaming cups of well seasoned stew concocted of oats, sunflower seeds, wheat germ, raw peanuts, currants, raw sugar, and sweet-smelling, warm maple syrup. By the time he finally reached the front of the food line, Harold was unable to take his eyes off her long, brown, shiny hair softly swaying across her narrow back as she moved back and forth between the food counter and bubbling pots of fragrant stew.

Earlier, glancing toward the end of the food line, she had already noticed the psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap of an apparently brand new acoustic guitar across the shoulders of the most timid and hungry-looking food customer standing in line.

“With such a fancy guitar, you should be performing on stage,” she suggested, smiling as he reached the head of the line where she stood with a steaming cup of stew in her hand.

Quickly, he lowered his gaze to her slender hand adorned with a twisted strand of hand-knotted turquoise beads. Unable to speak, with now visibly shaking hands, he was somehow able to accept the free meal offered in a cup. Nervously, he blushed as her hand lightly brushed across his own. Amused by such shyness, this talkative, outgoing girl leaned toward him.

“You'd better eat or you won't have enough strength to serenade me,” she teased.

“You smell as sweet as this warm maple syrup,” Harold bashfully complemented without thinking. Then, tremendously embarrassed by his silly remark, he retreated to the makeshift teepee.

“If you're thirsty, you can get a drink of water from the faucets across the parking lot,” she hollered as he hastily departed.

From a distance he was able to see her moving about the free kitchen and discovered that he found great pleasure just watching her. He slowly ate, enjoying her gift of food, and listened to psychedelic music flowing from the distant stage as he planned how he might possibly approach her again and this

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time be able to speak confidently. Somehow, he sensed that, like the tarp, his psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap might bring luck in the days ahead.

Later that evening, Harold carried his guitar, strapped as always across his back, as he strolled near the small, free stage that had been set up for use by any interested bands, poets, jugglers or soloists. He watched several amateur bands hardly able to carry a tune play songs, spurred on by the wholehearted enthusiasm of young hippie kids crowded about the stage. All that seemed to matter was the performers' desire to share their music with the crowd. It was evident that every song was a reason for celebration.

In an impromptu moment, after an amateur puppet theater performance put on by the Merry Bandits concluded, Harold swung his guitar forward and carefully stepped through a crowd of youngsters sitting in front of the free stage who were still laughing at the antics of the puppets. Walking across the stage to the microphone, he choose a favorite Beatles' song that just so happened to be on his mind—"I Wanna Hold Your Hand"—the last song he heard stateside before he shipped off in the Navy. It was the Beatles' first American number one hit, entering the *Billboard* Hot 100 chart in January 1964 at number forty-five and starting the British Invasion of the American music industry. By February it had reached the number one spot. Harold, caught up in his own fantasy about carefully holding the delicate hand of the delightful girl behind the Hog Farm food counter, didn't bother to look out at the bystanders assembled beyond the youngsters.

As the crowd rewarded Harold with whistling and applause for his song, he automatically snapped to attention. The youngsters at the front of the stage giggled at the sight of the ex-sailor in dungarees saluting them. Realizing that his Navy saluting habit might take a very long time to forget, Harold, embarrassed again, hastily descended the free stage steps.

Joan Baez was the only major act who showed up to play on the intimate free stage on Friday night. Standing within the crowd, she actually tapped



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Harold on his psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap as he left the stage and gave him a thumbs up. Harold never even realized that the girl from the free food stand, who had actually inspired his song choice, had watched his performance from the very back of the crowd. She found herself smiling at Joan Baez's gesture to the timid guitar player.

Wanting to disappear from sight, Harold hastily joined the masses at the main stage and watched Arlo Guthrie until 1 a.m. Later, he continued to blend with the crowd as they cheered Joan Baez's performance on the big stage from 1-2 a.m. She sang, among other songs, "Oh Happy Day," "The Last Thing on My Mind," "I Live One Day at a Time," "Take Me Back to the Sweet Sunny South," "Let Me Wrap You in My Warm and Tender Love," and "We Shall Overcome."

When the main stage lights eventually flashed, flickered, then stayed off, everyone went searching for a place to crash. Harold felt fortunate that the truck driver's tarp had secured him shelter in the large teepee. There were about twenty people sleeping inside with their heads toward the fire, laid out like spokes on a wheel.

At dawn, Harold slowly awoke, wondering if the beautiful, long brown-haired hippie had just been a pleasant dream. Stretching his sore back muscles, he stepped outside the teepee. Gazing across the vast festival site, he was once again impressed by the 80-ft. wide stage between two huge sound towers that each held sixteen loudspeakers all set up in the middle of this alfalfa field bordered by a pond (signs read *Filippini Pond*) near several groves of trees. Hundreds of portable toilets were scattered throughout the fair site. Already, each had a long, twisting line of music festival attendees waiting to use them that morning.

Choosing to wander toward a grove of trees behind the mess hall rather than stand in line again, Harold strummed his guitar, softly humming "Blowin' in the Wind," absentmindedly as he strolled. Nearing the pond, his

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humming ended abruptly when, once again, he could hardly believe his eyes. It appeared as if several of the commune folks were actually skinny-dipping in the pond! More importantly, in the middle of this amazing scene, was the girl of his dreams in the morning sunlight standing naked in the waist-deep pond and rinsing her clean, silky-brown hair. Frozen in place, he was unable to move, look away, or even actually take a breath.

Sensing Harold's stare upon her tanned back, the never-bashful girl turned and noticed the always-bashful boy, his guitar, and the eye-catching psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap. Suppressing a grin, she moved to the bank of the pond and put on the same bohemian skirt and peasant blouse worn the day before, still damp from being washed earlier in the pond. Though sensing that the girl noticed him staring at her, Harold remained still and silent even when she purposely walked straight toward him. She cheerfully announced, "My name is Monica. My friends call me Mony. Should we go closer to the stage so we can hear the music better?"

For the rest of the festival, whenever she was not working at the free food stand, they listened together to the music of Jimi Hendrix, The Who, The Band, Janis Joplin, Johnny Winter, Creedence Clearwater Revival, Jefferson Airplane, Ten Years After, Joan Baez, Santana, Joe Cocker, and Crosby, Stills, & Nash.

Joints were passed freely among the crowd, and although they didn't have their own marijuana, they often experienced the accumulated effects of second-hand marijuana smoke. As nights grew long, they shared wine and booze that were also freely passed among the crowd. Unwilling to leave each others presence, they shared his place in the teepee. As the endless downpour of rain drenched the festival, they sheltered together in an endless state of blissful, "festival promised" peace, even though the field of flowers outdoors quickly turned to mud. On Sunday night, still huddled under the tarp teepee, Harold once again stared thoughtfully at the vivid pink and dazzling orange-

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beaded daisies on Mony's bohemian skirt. As she leaned against his sea bag and guitar (his psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap blended with the daisies on her skirt) he became acutely aware he would never be able to leave her side no matter what, no matter when.

What were the odds that among the half-million, mostly barefoot, shirtless, or even naked hippies high on marijuana, Harold would actually meet the sweet love of his life and share soggy, three-day-old sandwiches with her in the middle of the never-ending rain at the historic Woodstock Music Festival of 1969? She was a smiling, mud-spattered, bohemian-skirted hippie with turquoise-bead-adorned wrists. By festival end, he was strumming and singing "You so fine, Mony, Mony".

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," she sang along.

Sometime during a musical lull, she explained to him that the Hog Farm commune members would be busing on to a new property in Llano, New Mexico after a brief, two week stop at the Texas International Pop Festival where she would work at another food stand. She was looking forward to the music of B.B. (Blues Boy) King. Harold knew that somehow he, his sea bag, and his guitar must find a spot on whichever nomadic bus she rode away in.

Although many concertgoers would remember this unique historical festival as a poorly organized fiasco, he would remember it as the adventure of a lifetime that initiated him into an unbelievably fantastic new life. Mony had already decided that she was falling in love with this ex-sailor, guitar-playing hitchhiker when she heard his impetuous performance on the free stage. She hadn't told him that during his song, "I Wanna Hold Your Hand," she felt her cheeks blush as she instantly fell in love.

The following week, Harold clutched his guitar and sea bag with determination as he climbed on board the Hog Farmer bus with Mony and headed to Texas.



Dallas International Motor Speedway  
 Interstate Hwy 35W @ Intersection of Round Grove Road  
 Lewisville, Texas

~August, 1969~

Once again, the Hog Farm was busy setting up their free food tent and “trip” tent (used to talk down people on bad LSD trips) near Lewisville Lake at the newly opened Dallas International Motor Speedway, the site of the Texas International Pop Festival. The schedule listed music performances to continue each day from four p.m. until four a.m. from August 30<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>.

Artists performing at the festival were Canned Heat, Chicago, Grand Funk Railroad, Janis Joplin, B.B. King, Led Zeppelin, Sweetwater and many other big names in blues, rock-and-roll, and psychedelic rock.

There was another free stage on the campground in addition to the main stage. The Hog Farmers provided a psychedelic light show as backdrop to the music. Hugh Romney, head of the Hog Farm Commune, acquired the nickname “Wavy Gravy” on this stage. Romney was lying onstage, exhausted after spending hours trying to get festivalgoers to put their clothes back on, when it was announced that B.B. King was going to play. As Romney began

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to get up, a hand touched on his shoulder. It was B.B. King, who asked him if he was wavy, gravy. Romney admitted that he was indeed. B.B. King and Johnny Winter proceeded to jam for hours after that. Romney said he considered this a mystical event and assumed Wavy Gravy as his legal name.

Many booths catered to the flower children by offering art, leatherwork, incense, T-shirts, candles, beads, and jewelry. Local residents observing from slow-moving cars on the adjoining highway complained festival participants sinfully swam naked in Lake Lewisville.

Harold and Mony were mostly inseparable throughout the event. Their happenstance meeting had been quite extraordinary, but now something feeling more permanent drew their hearts together. On Saturday night, as they listened to Canned Heat do "On the Road Again," the lyrics caused them to pause and consider their future.

Shiva's Head Band was a group in the lineup at Texas International Pop Festival. They were known for touring with Janis Joplin, Canned Heat, and Steve Miller. Mony, as outgoing as ever, chatted with the band as they unloaded and set up their gear. She discovered they were a Texas psychedelic rock band that had just started up two years earlier in Austin, where they were the house band at the Vulcan Gas Company nightclub. They were also in the process of opening a music hall and entertainment center to be called the Armadillo World Headquarters.

A roadie named Lucky from Shiva's Headband noticed Mony and Harold, the orange- and pink-daisy couple, working at the Hog Farm's Food Stand and admired their work ethic, along with their obvious attraction and devotion to each other. The roadie approached Spencer Perskin and his wife Susan, creator's of Silva's Headband, and mentioned the value such a hard-working couple could bring to their new enterprise in Austin.

Mony had spent the last few years on never-ending road trips while Harold had spent the last few years on never-ending sea voyages. They were

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both beginning to realize they felt an urge to stay together, settle down, and find a place to call home. When the roadie happened to ask the pair where they were headed to next, the two turned to each other and stared at each other in apprehension.

“If y'all ever find yourselves in Austin, be sure and come by the Armadillo World Headquarters. A job will be waiting for you if you're interested,” suggested Lucky.

Harold and Mony, still looking at each other, simultaneously smiled and spoke out together, “We're interested!”

Together, Harold and Mony approached Hog Farm leader and peace activist Wavy Gravy and nervously revealed they were leaving his commune at the end of the festival. Although he shook his head and voiced strong misgivings, he was not blind to the growing affection between the couple and knew they were both travel-weary. When they turned down the idea of traveling on to the Hog Farm's new commune site in Llano, New Mexico, he slowly grinned and suggested they then might like to have their wedding ceremony before they all parted ways. Although it wouldn't exactly be a legal civil union, the couple could always visit a Justice of the Peace in Austin and make their marriage formal.

As performers and hippies were packing up at the end of the festival, the exhilarated couple met Wavy Gravy at the now abandoned free stage. Handsomely dressed in his Navy Enlisted Man's Full Dress Whites, Harold, as usual, had his guitar with the psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap slung over his right shoulder. Mony wore her vividly colorful, lake-washed bohemian dress and peasant blouse down off her shoulders. Wearing his white jumpsuit and out-of-shape, oversized cowboy hat, Wavy Gravy officiated their hippie wedding as they each recited their personal vows.

The glowing coral and turquoise colors of the Texas sunset reflected across the glassy still water of a large lake nestled in the distant rolling hills

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behind the free stage. This scene included the first evening star which twinkled brightly overhead completing a fitting, memorable backdrop to this group of three remarkable characters participating in this most unusual wedding ceremony.

“I’ll love you as long as such stunning sunsets fill the evening sky,” promised Mony as she gazed intently into Harold’s eyes.

“I’ll love you as long as all the stars above keep shining,” promised Harold as he lightly squeezed her petite hands cupped within his loving grasp.

“Our hearts forever united,” they spoke in unison as they both turned their gaze towards the western horizon in this moment that would be remembered forever.

“Peace,” announced Wavy Gravy.

At the proper moment, Harold lovingly placed a “good luck” strand of black, stone-carved beads with a Happy Buddha pendant, purchased with his remaining ditty bag funds at a festival jewelry booth, around Mony’s slender neck. Blushing, he swung his guitar forward, and sang, “I Got You Babe” to his smiling bride. After their deep embrace with several drawn-out kisses, Wavy Gravy handed them an envelope, which when opened later revealed two marijuana joints and two one-hundred-dollar bills (typical wages for festival labor).

“Y’all hurry, this limo’s headed to Austin in two minutes,” shouted Lucky.

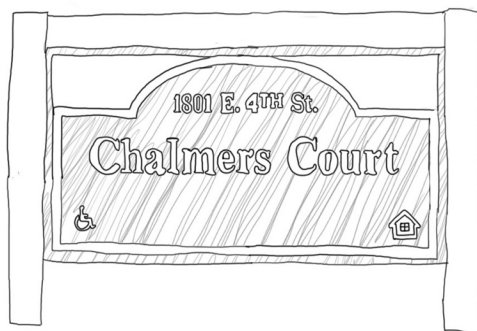
Lucky had backed the loaded Shiva’s Headband stage equipment truck up to the free stage, engine running, ready to drive back to Austin. At the conclusion of the wedding ceremony, this odd chauffeur and limo headed south with Harold and Mony in the back of the truck. The newlyweds leaned together against Harold’s sea bag for the short two hour drive to the Vulcan Gas Company Nightclub. Austin would be the location of their next gig, their own music festival for life. They felt fearless, ready to create their life together. Harold serenaded his bride, singing “Georgia on My Mind” but

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substituting Mony's name for "Georgia." Absentmindedly rubbing the round belly of the smiling Buddha pendant for good luck, Stella smiled, blissfully unaware of her own, soon-to-be round belly.



4



Chalmers Court  
1801 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street,  
Austin, Texas

~October 20, 1970~

Mony dangled her Happy Buddha beads over the secondhand, thrift-store crib tightly squeezed between their own bed and the open, screened window. Their two-month-old baby girl giggled in pleasure as she reached upward with hands and feet. Harold would be home soon, anxious to see Mony and his sweet baby when he returned home to their apartment. She was the happiest, most precious baby ever and Harold adored her. He never anticipated the joy his daughter would bring him.

Reflecting back over their move to Austin, Mony felt that, just like their first meeting, things just seemed to fall into place. Careful budgeting of their first \$200 had allowed them to survive until Harold got his first payroll check from the Armadillo World Headquarters (formerly operated as a popular wrestling and boxing Sports Center, and before that, the location of South Austin's National Guard armory). As Lucky had promised, Harold was hired as a night shift bartender at the Austin hippie nightclub.

Following a suggestion by Lucky, and also supported with a personal

## Hear My Soul Sing

reference from him, Mony applied for and got hired at Viva Les Amis café, largely due to her kitchen skills learned at Hog Farm's food stand. The cafe opened on May 1<sup>st</sup> at 24<sup>th</sup> Street and Nueces, one block from the University of Texas and also next door to Inner Sanctum Records (where Mony spent precious tip money buying "I'll Be Your Baby Tonight" by Emmylou Harris).

The restaurant attracted students, semi-successful musicians, struggling artists, and would-be writers, all usually on a low budget, who mostly ordered a bowl of beans and rice—with cheese, if they paid extra. The atmosphere was casual. Customers often sat and read a book without being hassled. Mony rode city transit buses to work; it was only 3 miles each way. She became famous for developing the restaurant's cuisine, which she now often cooked for Harold at home, though seldom topped with cheese, which was not in their budget. (Viva Les Amis café was the future site of Starbucks in 1998.)

Their apartment was located in Chambers Courts, a low income HUD project with 158 apartments in thirty one- or two-story concrete buildings. After they discovered Mony was pregnant with their first child, they had been delighted to find this modest apartment. Rhythm birth control had definitely not been effective for their passionate new marriage.

Mony smiled again at her precious daughter still kicking up at the Happy Buddha beads. She was pleased that their one-bedroom apartment was on ground floor. It was so much easier with the baby. She also planted a large flowerpot with pink and orange daisies that sat just outside their front door. They often sat out there in the evening while Harold played his acoustic guitar and sang folk songs about their love before he left for work at Armadillo World Headquarters. On their front step, the bicycle on loan from Lucky was parked. Harold rode it two miles each way to the 'Dillo.

Their apartment, located less than one mile east of downtown Austin, was very small, with little storage space and the tiniest kitchen and bathroom ever. The thirty-year old building was made of thick, dense concrete and masonry,

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so all the apartments retained miserable heat during the summer. The tiny living room window A/C unit often only sputtered bits of cool air because apartment wiring was not reliable. Utilities were nearly impossible to fix since they were embedded within the concrete floors, ceilings, and masonry walls. It was rumored that sewer and site drainage didn't meet code although greater concern was the possibility of exposure to lead-based paint in the units and asbestos in the floor tile, sinks, and wall texture. Harold and Mony had no time to worry about these maintenance problems. They were just happy they had a roof over their heads.

The front screen door squeaked open and then bounced shut. Mony laughed as Harold called out for his Stella Harmony. At their daughter's birth, they had quite a time picking out a proper name for such a splendid baby girl. They were both very adamant that her name would be a combination of both their names and also be reminiscent of their fate-filled, Woodstock meeting. Combining their names together, part Harold, part Mony, quickly produced "Harmony." Then, inspired as he glanced at the brand name of his ever-present guitar, Harold proudly announced her full name. In cursive lettering on the head stock of his prized guitar was her clearly destined name, Stella Harmony.

Princess Stella Harmony had been barely twenty minutes old, swaddled and contentedly cuddled in Mony's arms, when Harold, her brand new adoring Daddy, softly, tearfully serenaded them with "God Only Knows"—the heartfelt single from the B-side of The Beach Boys single "Wouldn't It Be Nice".

Unruled Composition Book

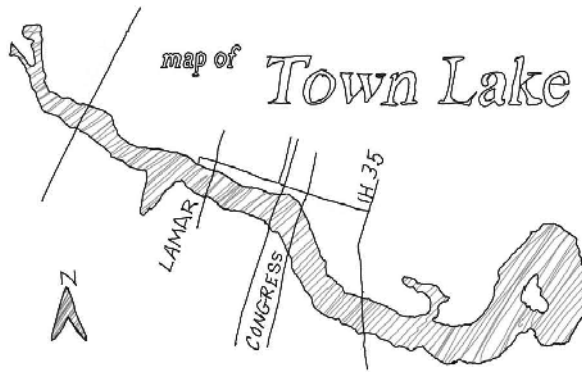
Stella Harmony Walker

Notes To Self



Judy K Johnson

5



Town Lake Shoreline  
(south of downtown over Congress Ave. Bridge)  
Austin, Texas

-Recalling November, 1972-

My earliest, precious princess memories (before lonely darkness engulfed me) are treasured gems that I hold in my heart, few but priceless. I ponder them often so I'll never forget that short time when my small world was perfect. At the time, I thought it would never end. I was the royal princess of a joyful, magical kingdom that was supposed to go on forever. Some special memories about my dear Daddy

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are etched so vividly and securely in my thoughts that I know I'll always be able to recall them.

I'm sitting on a blanket shaded under a baby pink parasol safely away from the edge of the water where Mother stands working a long fishing pole back and forth. Entranced with the peacock feather pattern above me, I'm busy watching as an unseasonably warm breeze sways the parasol back and forth. Daddy lazes nearby, fingerpicking his guitar, singing "Can't Take My Eyes Off You." The words "pretty baby" make me giggle and coo in pure delight.

The breeze makes me thirsty so Daddy holds a cup of cool, lip-puckering, sweet lemonade to my lips. I remember that whenever I feel any discomfort, Daddy is quickly there to sooth me. At any moment, he's always available for countless hugs and kisses. My early memories of his face are an ever present smile with sparkling eyes, and his checks are often pressed against mine. It's not unusual for him to pull off my shoes and socks just to tickle my toes.

Mother is cheering from the shore mostly overgrown with tall, thick weeds. The fishing pole she is holding seems

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to pull her closer to the water's edge. Then accompanied by her exuberant shout, a fish flips from the water and bounces about on the shoreline. Rushing to her assistance, Daddy captures the fish, removes the hook, and then places it in the cooler with another fish already there. There's not many fish here yet, but Mother is as patient with her fishing as she is with everything.

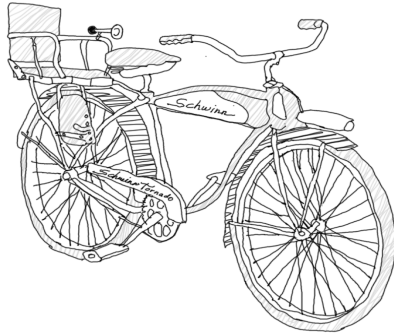
Always, this memory instantly triggers another memory right behind. Mother is frying fresh fish in the tiny kitchen. She places plates of fresh peas and fish before Daddy and me. The fish is delightfully tender and salty—I remember eating it with just my chubby fingers, enthusiastically licking them between mouthfuls. I also remember laughing because Daddy is licking his fingers just like me. Mother eats all her fish and quickly reaches for the last piece on the platter between us. Our rewarding fishing adventures followed by delicious, fried fish dinners are a frequent family adventure before my brother is born.

Another gem of a memory is Daddy taking me for a ride on Lucky's bike that he primarily uses to ride to work. He



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transports me around behind him in the rear mounted green metal "Schwinn Approved Child's Seat/Rear Utility Rack".



The wind blows my hair back and I feel happy. My favorite adventure is riding over the arched six lane Congress Avenue Bridge above Town Lake where we fish.

Daddy had fastened a bike horn to the side of my seat, and I incessantly squeeze it as we ride along—causing Daddy to burst out in long and loud laughter. We're a dandy pair cruising on that old red Schwinn Deluxe Tornado bicycle. I'm so spoiled that I carefully watch Daddy whenever he approaches our apartment door to leave. I know he'll be riding the bike when he tells me he's going to work. When he gives me a good-bye hug, I refuse to let go without

## Hear My Soul Sing

crying. He patiently relieves my anxiety by consenting to a short ride around the block. Then I reward his efforts with a smile, a kiss, and a cheerful wave as he rides off to work.

We all three love going to the river almost daily, even if it's considered an eyesore by the community with the shoreline neglected and polluted. Then one remarkable morning as Daddy is reading the morning paper, he jumps up in joy. After dancing a cheerful jig in front of us, he explains that Mayor Roy Butler has partnered with Lady Bird Johnson to establish the Town Lake Beautification Committee to transform the area where we fish into a useable recreation area. A system of hiking and biking trails will be built along the shoreline of the lake to transform it into a major attraction for the city of Austin. (Eventually, Town Lake is renamed Lady Bird Lake.)

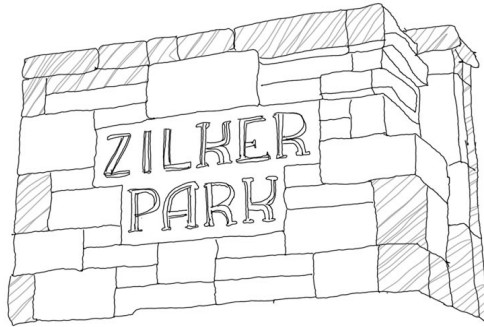
Daddy gets very involved with this city project. He loves the idea of trails for us to explore. He eagerly volunteers to help plant hundreds of shrubs and trees. On days when he isn't working at the 'Dillo, he works with the city crew. This is a fateful coincidence when he eventually is

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hired to work full time for the Austin Parks and Wildlife Department. Mother and Daddy feel blessed that he now has a better paycheck and real benefits. On weekends he continues to bartend at the 'Dillo.

Even though Daddy has a hectic life working two jobs, I always feel his steadfast love and devotion. I'm his darling princess and he's my Prince Charming.

6



Zilker Metropolitan Park  
2100 Barton Springs Road  
Austin, Texas

-Recalling March, 1973-

Mother and I stretch out on the grassy park grounds. We're busy with our project. She hands me chubby, bright-colored crayons as I color in the pencil-drawn shapes on the thick, brown wrapping paper. I'm impressed with several beautiful birds she sketches, both big and small, with wings stretched out in flight. I purposely colored them coral pink for the flamingo, white for the dove, and bright red for the

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background. Daddy draws some curly lines, music notes and stars. Mother tells me how proud she is of me for coloring so well.

We happen to be at the Zifker Kite Festival, held every year the first weekend in March. Hundreds of people around us are busy with their own projects. There's lots of paper, tape, string, and ribbon everywhere. Until I finish my intense artistic coloring, I'm not quite aware that the project will transform into a magnificent kite with purple ribbon streamers attached. I'm a little puzzled how everything will work, but as I look around some more, I see the sky is full of many floating, sailing, and diving kites of all shapes and sizes, both big and small. Mother holds the reel of string attached to the kite and Daddy runs quickly away from us, lifting then tossing our beautiful kite into the air.

How truly magnificent and breathtaking! Mother holds on tightly as our brightly colored birds fly up higher and higher. Then, when I can barely see our own kite among all the others in flight, Mother hands me the reel of string. I

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feel the tug of the string pulling my arms. I almost think I am about to fly skyward with the kite. Eventually, I discover I can skip along forward and back and jump from side to side and the kite will dance in the sky. Over and over, Mother and Daddy clap their hands together, laugh, and cheer. I feel like their perfect princess. I feel courageous, strong, and powerful holding on to my magical kite with those perfectly colored birds.

At last growing weary of holding on to my fantastic kite, I hand the string reel over to Daddy. Mother has another surprise. She and I walk over to a booth where an artist is painting beautiful flowers on the cheeks of people waiting in line. Having never seen anything so extraordinary, I'm spellbound when Mother asks the artist to paint a flowing peacock feather on my cheek. The thin, fine brush tickles across my face, up and down, around and around. Then the artist proudly sits back and holds up a mirror to my face. The feather is fantastic. The day seems magical because it makes me feel like I really am Mother and Daddy's most precious princess, especially adorned with

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such a perfect, beautiful feather.

As the perfect afternoon comes to an end, Mother wraps her arms around me as we sit together on a soft quilt laid out on the grass watching the last of the kites continue their flight towards the first evening stars. Daddy, as always, picks up his acoustic guitar with the psychedelic-orange, daisy guitar strap and serenades us, his lovely girls, singing "Happy Together" under the deepening, dark blue skies.

7



Barton Springs Pool  
2201 Barton Springs Road  
Austin, TX

-Recalling September, 1973-

There is no escape from the humid heat in our suffocating little apartment. I remember the whirling sounds of a noisy tabletop fan blowing me a welcome breeze from a dresser near my bed at night. During the muggy afternoons, Mother lets me run around only in my daisy print panties. She pats my tummy and calls me her Happy Buddha baby.

One scorching hot day, Daddy delights Mother and me



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by unexpectedly coming home early. He has a surprise hidden behind his back and makes me guess what it might be as I jump up and down in eager anticipation. When I run out of ideas, Daddy finally reveals a new one-piece, red-ruffled swimsuit for me and announces that he has a wonderful way for us all to cool off. Mother grins and hurries about to gather a quilt and bath towels. Then she dresses me in my beautiful new swimsuit and spins me around to model it for Daddy who leans over to hug and kiss me.

We load up everything in Daddy's "brand new," slightly used, 1964 tan and blue Chevy Impala station wagon. He is so proud of its 409 big block V-8 with 340 horsepower and automatic power glide transmission. He's done well in his new job. We are now able to go anywhere without riding Lucky's bike or the city buses. My favorite parts of our station wagon are the electric windows and the air conditioning, but it's also great fun to ride in the rear-facing, third-row bench seat. Mother likes all the room we now have to pack stuff. There's even a roof rack on top. I love our new car, and Daddy always keeps it shiny clean in perfect working order.

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Daddy knows about all the best Austin parks because he now works for the city. As he drives south on Lamar Boulevard near our apartment, he explains that we are headed to Barton Spring's Pool. He assures Mother that there's a section of nice, shallow water where I'll have a safe and splendid time. He promises me that we'll hunt for the special endangered Barton Spring Salamander which I'm not sure will be a fun adventure for a little girl like me.

Daddy explains how this is actually the ancient site where Tonkawa Native Americans gathered, believing that the artesian springs surrounded by limestone formations were a sacred healing site. By the time we arrive, we are convinced we are in the middle of a fantastic "Daddy adventure" once again. We park and walk past bathhouses, looking with genuine amazement at the natural springs.

As promised, I truly have a delightful time splashing and dipping my face beneath the surface of the water at the shallow end of the pool. Daddy cautions me to be careful and is always just inches away from my side. It is a little slippery on mossy rocks below. The water is cool and

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refreshes us all immediately. We watch others diving from the edge of the pool into deeper water, but the three of us are content to sit together in the shallow end. And true to his promise, at one point Daddy points out a strange little lizard-like creature hiding among rocks at the edge of the water, and I learn the word "salamander."

As evening approaches, Mother has a wonderful suggestion. She's observed me often turning my head to check out the swings at the new Zilker Playscape next to Barton Springs. We dry ourselves off and hurry on over to the swings, slides, and teeter-totters. Mother and Daddy patiently follow me from one play area to another until about an hour later I sit, happy but exhausted, rubbing my eyes, stalled on the bottom end of the teeter-totter.

This memory ends here in perfect bliss when I instantly fall soundly asleep as Daddy picks me up and carries me back to our station wagon. That treasured memory of Daddy's comforting shoulder and strong arms holding me against him as he strides toward the parking lot comforts me to this day.

8



Residence of Harold & Mony Walker  
Reese Drive,  
Sunset Valley, Texas  
(actually located within the city limits of Austin, TX)

-Recalling April 14<sup>th</sup>, 1974-

It's Easter. Early that morning, we pack our station wagon with Daddy's guitar, a willow-woven picnic basket lined in red gingham checks filled with lots of snacks prepared by Mother, and also a quilt with pillows gathered by Daddy for our picnic on the ground. We don't drive terribly far, but it seems like we are way far out in the country. At the end

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of a narrow road called Reese Drive—where Daddy chooses to stop and spread blankets for our picnic—sets a place with lots of shade trees at a place called Valley Creek Park.

Mother and Daddy have not one but two big secrets that they want to tell me. Also, along with the enticing secrets there is another surprise that Daddy has managed to hide somewhere on the grassy lawn where we've enjoyed our picnic. I jump, squirm, then jump some more.

Williams Creek, a small stream trickles nearby. Daddy plays his guitar and sings songs by Percy Sledge: "Let Me Wrap You in Warm and Tender Love" and "When a Man Loves a Woman." Mother seems so very, very happy, smiling first at Daddy and then me. I notice that Mother is touching her Happy Buddha beads she's wearing around her neck. I feel very special, and know that they love me tremendously because obviously there is a big surprise coming and also two secrets.

Sitting on Mother's lap, she strokes my fingers softly, pausing to sometimes reach up and caress my cheek. I sense she is happy and peaceful, even though I see a tiny tear

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sitting in the corner of her eye. As Daddy's guitar serenade finishes, I hold my breath, wondering about my wonderful surprise and two mysterious secrets. Of course, it's my choice, and naturally I immediately choose to receive my surprise first. Daddy tells me to search behind the big oak shade tree behind us, where I easily find a brightly wrapped present with a candy-filled Easter basket.

Delighted, I race back to my parents on the blankets, where, squealing with delight, I tear into my surprise as my parents laugh and knowingly smile at each other. What a joy I behold! It's a fancy new baby doll that Mother informs me is called Baby Brother Tender Love. Daddy opens the box for me and hands me this most wonderful, beautiful, baby boy doll. He reads me the information on the box as I examine every detail of this perfect baby doll.

"All soft, vinyl, stuffed body with rooted blonde hair and painted brown eyes. A unique feature of this boy doll is that he is anatomically correct." (Although this is quite controversial at the time, my parents are very progressive. This is an excellent way to talk to me about babies.)

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"Skin so soft he looks and feels real. Adores being bathed, fed, changed, and loved. Teach him to sit, stand, and to pose just like a real baby. Soft skin, movable arms and legs make it easy to imagine he's alive."

I'm immersed in holding and cuddling my new baby doll, completely satisfied for the moment, completely forgetting two remaining secrets promised for this magnificent day. I dress and undress, feed, snuggle, and rock this perfect, precious doll in my arms. Satisfied and content I lean back against Mother; she asks me if I have a name for my new doll.

I announce I'll call him "Baby Billy" and then deliver more requests. I plead with Mother to help me make him some more baby clothes and diapers and baby blankets. I plead with Daddy to make him a baby bed.

Daddy reminds me once again about the remaining two secrets as I sit in Mother's arms cuddling my doll. Squeezing Baby Billy tightly, I pause, ready for Daddy's two mysterious revelations. He proudly announces the two most surprising, delightful secrets I could ever, ever

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possibly imagine.

The first one is I'm going to get a real live baby sister or brother in the fall. The baby is actually growing right now in Mother's tummy and will be born in several months. Wow!

The second secret is that across the narrow road from the very place where we are now sitting, this beautiful park with shade trees and a large, grassy lawn, is where we are soon going to live. Suddenly, I notice the house that is really going to be our own new home. Daddy says the sign at the mailbox says "Sold" because he and Mother have purchased the property.

Mother and Daddy, both laughing and crying at the same time, watch as I skip about, looking at my surroundings really closely for the first time, seeing in amazement what appears to be an adventure wonderland everywhere I turn. Daddy lifts me (I'm holding tightly on to my precious baby doll) up onto his familiar broad shoulders, which I always adore, and carries me around on a tour of our new home explaining every detail.



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Our new house is located near the end of Reese Drive in Sunset Valley, a tiny rural community started in the early 1950s and incorporated as Sunset Valley in 1954, even though it consisted of less than two square miles of land area with less than 200 people living there. It is entirely surrounded by the city of Austin. Our house was built in 1955 on 1.5 acres of land, which to me seemed like a whole play park. It has 3 bedrooms, 2 baths, and a kitchen with a dining area connected to the living room. Mom is thrilled beyond belief that there is a large walk-in pantry (which I later discover is a great place to hide). Another delight for Mother is the utility room at one end of the carport where she does a little happy dance. No more tiring trips to the laundromat. My favorite part of our new home is the currently empty rabbit hutch in the back yard next to an amazing, enormous garden, which is Daddy's favorite spot after the carport.

After this day of jubilation, my parents and I get very busy packing our modest belongings, clothes, and dishes into boxes which Daddy loads into the back of our station wagon

## Hear My Soul Sing

and delivers to our new home on Reese Drive. It takes him numerous trips. We only have two weeks to move. It's exhausting, but we're all excited because we're moving to the country. Lucky from the 'Dillo borrows Shriya's Headband's equipment road truck and transports my parent's furniture and remaining belongings, which includes all my toys now packed securely in Daddy's old sea bag, to our new destination. Lucky also loads the old red Schwinn Deluxe Tornado bicycle that actually belongs to him into the truck. Daddy protests that the bike should be returned to him now that we are moving. Lucky laughs and tugs on one of my braids, teasing that there are lots of places the bike and child seat will still carry us along those country roads.

9



Texas World Speedway  
17529 State Highway 6 South  
College Station, Texas

-Recalling July 4, 1974-

Daddy and Mother devise another adventure plan before the arrival of the new baby. They tell me we're going on a long drive—this time to a music festival weekend concert. They seem to know for sure how much fun it will be for all of us, so placing my trust in them and being a great fan of our adventures, I help Mother pack an overnight bag.

There is no question that my Baby Billy perfect doll

## Hear My Soul Sing

will go with us. He's my companion in the station wagon's third row seat; together we look out the rear window at the surrounding countryside flowing beyond the car. Daddy and Mother talk on and on about how wonderful it will be to have a brother or sister for me. However, the drive seems to go on forever, I become increasingly bored and irritable.

I fuss and whine for Mother to let my Baby Billy wear her Happy Buddha beads. She's been wearing her beads daily ever since our Easter picnic and the secret about a new baby. Mother says they bring her the very best luck. I notice frequently she touches the belly of the Happy Buddha and smiles. I envy that she has such magical beads. Eventually, because I'm relentless, Mother carefully passes her beads back to me to quiet me on our long drive. Grinning from ear to ear, I drape the Happy Buddha beads on Baby Billy.

The long two-hour drive takes us to College Station, this year's site of the annual Willie Nelson Fourth of July Concert. When we get to the picnic/concert held at the Texas World Speedway, the parking lot is packed. After

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walking through a tunnel to the infield where the concert is located, we see lots of American flags displayed along the path to the stage although they hang limp in the hot, dry, motionless air.

We casually walk past an enormous blue-and-white-striped hot air balloon tethered to the ground, which I later observe floating high over our heads filled with people cheering from the basket hanging beneath. I know I'd be crazy scared to be up in the sky in the hot air balloon basket. Still, from time to time, I lift my eyes skyward hoping to see if this magnificent balloon is still in sight. The Texas heat causes us to seek shelter beneath the large umbrella Daddy remembered to bring. It seems he has some previous experience attending music festivals.

Amazingly, at one point, the crowd sees a cluster of fireworks launch toward the parking lot. Music performances stop because there's a car actually on fire where the fireworks landed. I'm mesmerized by the billowing black smoke and the site of people pulling water hoses from a firetruck pulled into the parking lot near the fire.

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Mother decides it's time for us three to leave this scene and take a little rest at our room at Ramada Inn. We carefully, circle away from the firetrucks with their hoses splayed on the ground. Mother seems relieved that we are able to maneuver our station wagon out of the parking lot without getting near the commotion. Happily, just minutes later, we stop at the Dairy Queen and order my favorite: cheeseburger, fries, and chocolate shake. Then with full tummies and tired eyes, we check into our motel room. Immensely enjoying our cool, air-conditioned room, we all curl up together and fall into a relaxed nap for several hours. Of course, Baby Billy, who I carry everywhere, naps with us.

When we return to the concert, we notice several charcoal burned-out vehicles still in the parking lot. It makes Mother more than a little nervous, and I cling tightly to Daddy's hand as we walk past, hoping that there will be no more worrisome fires.

People are very friendly everywhere we walk. The only other startling image I see is the sight of several ladies with their shirts off perched on the shoulders of men with

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cowboy hats. I look cautiously up at Mother's face to observe her reaction. She is laughing with Daddy. This concert behavior apparently doesn't seem unusual to them. She does cautiously move us away from some college kids who are smoking something stinky they call joints.

I believe my favorite concert moment is "Diggy Liggy Low," performed by Doug Kershaw. Its pure peppiness entices me to dance and jump, bouncing Baby Billy at my side until I actually lose my grip, unintentionally tossing him into the crowd around us. Snapping to attention, Daddy jumps to retrieve him and prevents my immeasurable loss of this precious possession. When the band starts playing "Orange Blossom Special," he reaches down and takes Baby Billy from my arms, holding him as I start jigging once again. Mother and Daddy laugh with me as I bounce to the rhythm of the drums and fiddle throughout the entire song.

Another amazing performer, Marcia Ball, from "Freda and the Firedogs" plays piano in such a peppy fashion that I'm once again bouncing and swaying to the music in rhythm

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to her contagious beat. Daddy says her band is from Austin, and he's heard them play at the 'Dillo sometimes when he bartends. I'm hopping up and down in the same rhythm as she bounces on the piano bench to the peppy beat of the song, "Jambalaya." Her dancing fingers fly across the keyboard like magic, creating the liveliest tune I could ever imagine. I wish that I could make that musical magic myself.

Eventually, Mother says it's time to head for home, and, once again exhausted from heat, we leave these interesting sights and ongoing music. The parking lot at the festival is still full of cars, including the few that burned earlier. It's been quite an experience for me. This is the first time I've ever seen so many amazing people and things all in the same place.

Driving west towards Austin and our own Sunset Valley paradise, Daddy turns on the radio for some easy listening as we start our long journey home. The first and only song I hear playing is "I'll Have to Say I Love You in a Song," Mother slides across the front seat closer to



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Daddy, leaning her head against him. I can see Mother loves hugging Daddy's shoulder just as much as I do. I fall asleep hugging my "Baby Billy" in my favorite third row seat while my fingers pretend they were playing piano as they lightly tap on my imaginary piano.

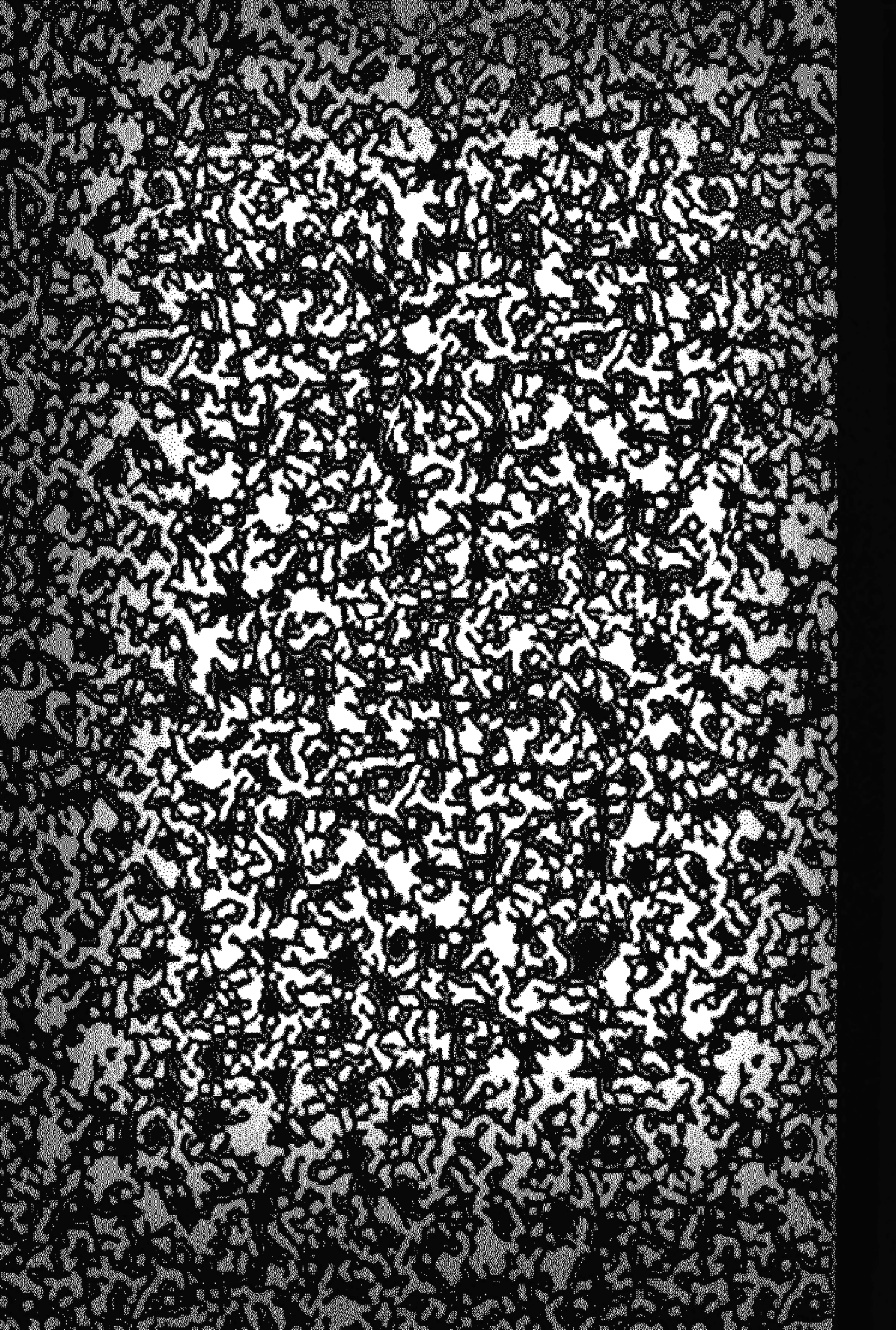


It's only been a couple weeks since the three of us traveled to the Willie Nelson concert. Our summer fun seems to have ended. Mother and I lie together in her bed enduring itchy blisters that are turning to scabs across our bodies. I have them on my face and tummy. Mother has them everywhere. Mother has carefully covered us in Calamine lotion to relieve our itching struggles. Daddy thinks we were probably exposed to Chickenpox some time on our road trip. I'm miserable and pouty. Mother tosses and turns on the bed trying to get comfortable.

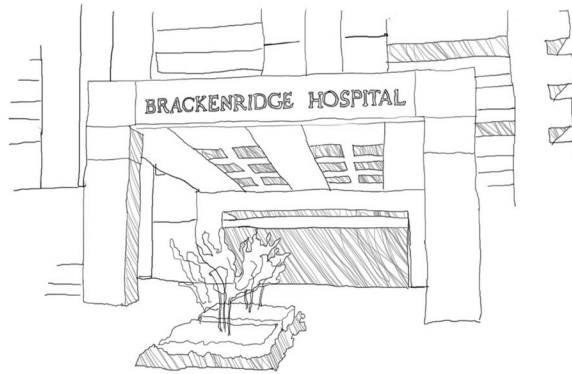
## Hear My Soul Sing

Remembering the comfort her stone-carved Happy Buddha beads bring her, Mother asks me to fetch them from my Baby Billy doll. Feeling grumpy and moody, I reluctantly comply and trudge off in slow steps to fetch my doll. Finally, after Mother calls out for me several times, I slowly return, loudly sobbing in bewildered regret, clutching my doll but with no signs of the black carved beads. Unintentionally, I've lost her Happy Buddha treasure and sense I've done something very, very bad. The thought of making my Mother cry turns me inconsolably miserable. Back in her bed, I snuggle into her arms sobbing, "I'm sorry." She softly whispers not to worry but I hear her sad, soft sigh and feel what I imagine are her wet tears on the back of my neck.

The chickenpox rash keeps me unhappily bed-bound for many long days. Mother begins to feel much better before I do, leaving me alone in bed as I ponder if I'm really responsible for losing her precious Happy Buddha beads. Even though she doesn't question me again, I often think about how it is my fault that I made Mother so sad.



# 10



Brackenridge Hospital  
601 East 15<sup>th</sup> Street  
Austin, Texas

~October 31, 1974~

Finally, the Walker family's sweet dreams about the arrival of their precious baby were about to become reality. Mony began to experience mild labor pains a little past midnight, and the whole family cheerfully proceeded to Brackenridge Hospital the next morning. Stella was told that she would get to see her new brother or sister very soon. While Mony was being monitored by nurses, Harold sat giggling with Stella in the waiting room about all the happy playtime they would have with their new baby. But moments after the birth, Harold was urgently summoned to Mony's side. Thankfully, a nice nurse's aide was available to sit with Stella and amuse her with numerous children's picture books.

They never imagined that all their hopes and dreams of promised joy could be horribly shattered and replaced by the terrors of a devastating birth. The birth had not been difficult, but the actual arrival of their new son revealed quite staggering birth defects. Harold and Mony clutched each other's hands tightly and stared in combined shock and disbelief at the

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painfully obvious, unimaginable disfigurement of their new baby boy. Their own horror and grief mirrored in the faces of the medical staff in the delivery room. The baby's deformities were quickly detailed in the doctor's delivery notes, and then he was quickly rushed away from the stunned and distressed parents for closer examination in the nursery. Thankfully, this hospital was well known for its prestigious newborn care.

Harold and Mony were left alone in her recovery room, too speechless to make sense of their personal disaster. Their wet, swollen eyes met, but no words were exchanged. Any decision on their son's name was forgotten and wouldn't be addressed for several days. Endless tears continued to flow down their burning faces as they realized that there was no way to undo this ordeal or even begin to hope for a solution. Mony finally whispered in a shaky, forlorn voice for Harold to take Stella home. As Harold slowly left the room, attempting to dry his eyes with the twisted cuff of his sleeve, she turned her face away toward the wall and sobbed uncontrollably.

Many days later, when it was confirmed that Mony and baby son would finally be discharged from the hospital, Harold realized that they must decide upon a name for their son before they presented him to Stella. Without much contemplation, they hastily agreed upon Shane Lee Walker, a combination of their middle names.

Home again, Mony became endlessly preoccupied with her new son's birth defects. Her priority was to heal the many red, jagged lesions on his face, arm, and leg. She applied prescribed ointments to his swollen wounds and dressed them with precisely applied gauze bandages. At other times, she removed the bandages and exposed the wounded, scarring skin to fresh air for a time before she carefully, lovingly bathed him and applied more ointment and new bandages.

It was a never-ending routine. Shane, extremely fussy, resisted any touch, loudly screaming out at the top of his lungs and flailing about in jerky

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motions with his left index finger and thumb. He also seemed to have major digestive issues. No matter how carefully Mony fed and burped Shane, he reacted within minutes with fierce, painful colic evidenced by his tightly contracted tummy muscles and even more shrill screams of distress. Upon the onset of Shane's screams, Stella ran in terror down the hallway and hid.

Mony's attempts to include Stella in holding and feeding her new brother resulted in predictable frustration, eventually ending with all three of them crying in unison and Stella running off again to hide. Even though Shane was usually swaddled in soft baby blankets so Stella wouldn't notice his bandaged limbs, she was still terrified of the lesions on Shane's face and his malformed eye. Displaying sheer panic, she recoiled from touching his face. When coerced to kiss her brother, she would only do so from arms length, barely kissing the very tips of the fingers on his normal right hand.

Even while Shane was plagued with intense pain from the many open sores positioned from head to toe on his left side, he was also plagued with just as many internal, twisting pains from colic and indigestion. The only sleep Mony got was in the rocking chair placed inches from Shane's crib, where he fitfully slept for short moments before once again waking with cries of distress. Stella no longer spent time in her parent's bed. Harold no longer felt the warmth of Mony lying next to him in their bed at night. They both lay awake in their own bedrooms listening to Mony hum her lullaby from down the hall in the nursery.

Harold and Mony attended Shane's many doctor appointments. Doctors assured them that his lesions—which they describe as necrotic-hemorrhagic bullae on his left deltoid region, quadriceps, and lower left facial area—would eventually heal, becoming less swollen and red as time went by. Special care needed be taken to avoid infections while Shane's lesions were healing. There would be hypo-pigmented scarring, but it would be minimal if Mony tended the wounds fastidiously with exacting care in the manner they prescribed to

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her. Doctors discussed the hypoplasia of Shane's extremities with muscular atrophy and the critical condition of his severe clubfoot that would most likely require surgery to correct just as soon as his lesions had healed. However, because of significant muscle atrophy, his parents needed to devote special attention to exercising his weak leg continuously as he grew.

Other critical conditions were Shane's limp left arm and his severely disfigured, shrunken eye. Shane would probably only have minimal use of his arm; his doctors feared nerve damage had caused partial paralysis of the lower part of the limb and fingers. Focus should be made on working with him to hold things with his thumb and only opposing finger on that hand. Finally, upon inconclusive testing, doctors reported that they also feared that Shane would have no vision in his left, shrunken, angular-directed eye that revealed a noticeably large cataract. The condition was called microphthalmia. They would retest vision in his eye when he is older. He appeared to have normal vision in his right eye. Finally, in summation, doctors remarked that there was no conclusive evidence of the actual cause for Shane's birth defects.

As Mony mournfully tended her disfigured son, she worried incessantly about the potential clubfoot surgery that Shane would have to endure if he was ever to have a chance at standing upright and walking independently. While she comforted Shane in her rocking chair, she sadly pondered whether all this devastation was a result of a genetic defect or something else. She had an expanding mental list of possible situations that could have caused Shane's severe birth defects but confided them to no one.

Silence in the Walker household was fraught with unspoken worries about Shane and their unexpected, forever, life-changing catastrophe. Fearing similar possibilities with future pregnancies, Mony carefully avoided all intimacy with Harold. Harold, distraught with concern for his entire family, felt inadequate to provide the needed support for his family to help anyone,

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including himself. Stella, in order to avoid contact with her parents or baby brother, hid silently in her bedroom or in the dark corner of the pantry closet under the bottom shelves. The massive change in her parents caused Stella to feel responsible. Her life was filled with devastating sadness and guilt as she tried to figure out all the things she did wrong to cause this never-ending crisis.

Harold's guitar now sat unattended in the far corner of their bedroom, just as Stella's Baby Billy doll was hidden and forgotten in the picnic basket. Joy, of any kind, was not possible in this broken, divided family. When Harold was home, he could be found strolling through the overgrown, weed-filled garden during the day or sitting alone outdoors at night in silence, sadly staring up at the abundant, steady stars shining in the dark country sky. Stella mostly sat silently looking out her bedroom window either waiting for her Daddy to get home or watching her Daddy sit outdoors alone in darkness.

Mony was always attending Shane. Oddly, the only melody now heard in the Walker household was Mony quietly humming her own soulful, wordless lullaby that she apparently composed to express her broken heart for her baby boy. She had no words to describe the pain she shared with her second-born child as she attempted to soothe them both. She hummed the loudest as she applied lotions to tenderly soothe the painful lesions on his skin while he screamed in agony.

Mony continuously, lovingly caressed him and softly kissed his disfigured eye for which she had no solution to mend. If there would ever be an answer to whether this eye had sight, it must wait. There were more severe problems to attend to now. Every waking minute of the day, Mony nursed Shane's painful sores, sadly anticipating that when they healed, her baby must undergo surgery suggested by his pediatrician to align his twisted clubfoot. She mourned that this would surely cause additional, new pain and distress to her already painfully distressed baby boy.



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Long, anguish-filled months crawled by. Mony only left the house when she took Shane to his many doctor appointments. Harold did all the shopping and errands after work. Stella avoided contact with Shane by hibernating in the pantry closet and only appearing from time to time to watch for her Daddy out the window. The only sounds heard were those of Shane's incessant crying accompanied by Mony's soulful, hummed lullaby. The winter passed with no holidays celebrated at the Walker house.

Eventually, many months later, Shane's skin lesions were pronounced healed enough by his pediatrician to undergo the previously suggested surgery for clubfoot, which produced intermingled feelings of gratitude and dread. Then, seated in the office of a highly recommended orthopedic foot and ankle surgeon, Harold and Mony listened as he gave a long detailed narrative that he supported with superfluous medical terminology that included the actual medical term for clubfoot, *talipes equinovarus*.

Noticing the dire concern on the puzzled, distressed faces of Shane's parents, the doctor promptly interrupted himself, starting over with simple descriptions. The surgeon carefully described in detail Shane's abnormal shortened tendons and ligaments on the inside of his lower left leg, which led to his foot turning inward. His tight Achilles tendon contributed to his foot rigidity. Actually, his clubfoot was not an uncommon birth defect, although a startled Harold and Mony had never known of a single case themselves. They listened intently as the doctor described three options.

In the '70s, surgery was becoming the most popular option. The most widely used procedure, postero-medial release (PMR), was the extensive surgical release of tight, contracted soft tissues of the clubfoot, which gave the patient a foot that appeared almost normal and functioned well in a short amount of time. The surgeon did comment that some of these surgeries, in followup studies, revealed that there was a possibility over time for the foot to become painful, stiff, and show early arthritic changes. Mony shuddered.

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A conservative option, called the Kite method for treating clubfeet, included a series of manipulations and castings of the lower leg and foot followed by night splinting with the feet held in dorsiflexion and slight abduction. The surgeon noted that some of these actual cases had proven unsatisfactory due to inaccurate manipulation of the foot and use of short, below-the-knee casts that proved inadequate to promote and hold the correct position of the foot. This method involved the patient sometimes having to wear plaster casts for up to two full years until the deformity was corrected. Mony shuddered again.

The final method described to Harold and Mony had actually been implemented in the 1940s, primarily because clubfoot surgery often resulted in permanent, painful deformities over time. This last method, the Ponseti technique, combined about four weeks of conservative manipulation casting, then a small surgery in the form of an Achilles tenotomy, finally followed by up to four years of a foot abduction brace to prevent relapses. This technique had been slow to catch on in popularity because of the lack of family commitment to consistent, corrective brace wearing for several years.

The Ponseti technique wasn't currently the most highly favored method. The surgeon heavily stressed that success of this technique depended highly on complete family understanding about what was involved in the casting process and how critical it was that the brace must be worn correctly and consistently. Parents needed to be aware that this treatment method required a serious, ongoing commitment from both parents. Harold and Mony, sombered by this information, asked for more details.

The Ponseti procedure would require Shane's foot to be manipulated to correct positions followed by serial applications of a long-leg plaster cast that needed to be changed every 5 to 7 days and might require up to four different castings. This would possibly require sedation if Shane was not cooperative during the process. Mony was pretty sure that Shane would require sedation.

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Then, a tenotomy of the Achilles tendon would have to be performed to correct the remaining contracture. In Shane's case, that procedure too would probably require an operating room.

After the final cast was removed, Shane would be put immediately into a foot abduction brace to prevent relapse. The brace would be made with shoes securely attached to a bar about the width of Shane's shoulders and set at specific angles. The brace would need to be worn 23 hours a day for the first 3 months and then only while sleeping (12 to 14 hours a day) until the age of four. The greatest problem with this method was the child's intolerance of the brace and lack of family support for correct daily wearing of the brace. Physical therapy during the bracing process helped patients with gait training and muscle strengthening. The surgeon then additionally noted that this actually might be a preferred method since Shane was already several months old. Harold and Momy held each other's hands tightly and together shuddered one last time.

That night, after Stella and Shane were finally asleep, Harold and Momy sat together at their red and chrome dinette table discussing the various treatments for Shane. Having been shrouded in isolating silence ever since Shane's birth, they at last finally reached out to each other in order to decide upon options for his dangling clubfoot. They felt compelled to agree on his particular treatment in order to avoid adding even more guilt to that which already hung heavy over their heads. They intended to explore every option and decide which medical approach they'd choose together.

Many hours later, the first brilliant rays of morning sun shone across a clear cloudless sky through the front window of the home at the end of Reese Drive, brightly reflecting across the weary but confident faces of Harold and Momy. It revealed new hope now apparent as they joined hands together across the table, vowing their united decision as they reviewed their conclusions. The fastest clubfoot correction required surgery but might be

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unsuccessful long term, resulting in limited motion and continuing pain later in Shane's life. Together, they dismissed the PMR surgery. Mony breathed a sight of relief since she had always harbored many misgivings and fears about extensive surgery to his foot.

The Kite method had a more conservative approach than surgery but also seemed inconclusive over the long term. It even involved wearing a cast continuously for up to 2 years. Harold could not begin to imagine Shane, just recovered from painful skin lesions on his clubfoot, to now be forced to wear a leg cast continuously for that long.

The Ponseti procedure required great family commitment, especially to support Shane's wearing of a leg brace until he was four years old. Gazing hopefully into each others eyes, they knew they could pull together to accommodate the tedious leg brace, and lots of ongoing physical therapy for Shane. Although this choice meant Shane would have to endure four years of night time restraint wearing a leg brace, it would be well worth it if there was a possibility that Shane could walk independently and pain free before he started school. By choosing this method, they were also choosing their united commitment in Shane's treatment plan. Some of their own pain that had been separating them seemed now to evaporate as they united in this extremely difficult goal for Shane's independent mobility. They held hands and squeezed tight. Once again, they felt the intense love and attraction between them that had been unexpressed since Shane's birth.