

Fall 1965

Even while at rest the normal state of my consciousness could best be described as “anxious” but starting school once more almost overpowered even my necessity-strengthened defenses.

My first enrollment at El Camino College in 1962 had been a prelude to scholastic disaster as I proved to be brilliantly unsuccessful at all things academic. This time, however, I was to apply myself to the study of a subject I not only knew something about but already had developed a love for, namely, music.

I had spent one and a half years in the army and that was more than long enough to convince me it would not be a lifelong career. My long scroll of doubts and failures did not magically vanish in the atmosphere of military life and I knew if I was ever going to do anything with my life it had to center around something I actually cared about.

When I joined up with the 163rd Signal Battalion in 1964, I was well aware that my immaturity was going to take a probably desperately needed pounding in basic training. The first thing I learned was that the world, seen in the cold, unrelenting light of reality, was a much different place than I had tricked myself into believing it to be. Either the world would have to change to accommodate me or I would have to change to accommodate it. The world won. I was forced to make a decision about my future and it was to study musical composition as soon as I left the service.

Although music has many unique qualities and features, one thing it shares with all other disciplines is the need to learn the foundational aspects through study and practice, tediously repetitive but essential for developing the basic skills and reflexes.

The constituent parts of music comprise a very detailed, special, and unique language that simply has to be learned if one wishes to turn random notes into something more than a chaotic mess. Although there are most certainly born composers, no one is born able to compose. Even an extraordinary prodigy such as Mozart had to know how to read music before he could write it; that is just a basic fact of the mechanics of human consciousness.

My first day of study featured the harmony instructor playing a simple prelude by Johann Bach. Though lasting not longer than one or two minutes, the mental and emotional impact upon me was nothing short of monumental. The teacher had chosen the piece to illustrate three definite aspects of baroque composition: absolute melodic clarity, very specific rhythmic parameters, and the exactitude of harmonic structure.

The healing nature of music is very well known and it was on these compositional parameters that I would build the foundation of an entirely new psychological house. They were to be the building blocks of my personal development.

My life had been as a haphazardly arranged musical piece, all disjointed vibrations and incoherent patterns. The qualities of baroque composition offered the perfect examples for the establishment of well-ordered harmonies and I felt that working with them, immersing myself in them, would be the balm of Gilead I so desperately needed.

Clarity was the paramount requirement. Years of seizure disorder and the resulting effects, both from within and without, had inflicted severe psychological trauma. From the very beginning of my association with it, music had filled the emotional void and been the center around which I could organize my consciousness. It was time for me to earnestly apply myself to mastering its principles the proper way.

Although I had been playing music for years, having begun studying the violin while still in grade school, my real love was composing. Say all that can be said about inspiration (and there is much to be said for it) music is a craft like any other, requiring study and continual practice in order to bring forth a worthwhile product. In addition to classroom work, I put in many additional hours in the study of orchestral scores, the works of the past masters.

One class, called “Form and Analysis,” dealt with an analysis of all twenty-eight Beethoven piano sonatas. What impressed me most about Beethoven was the continual evolution of his musical ideas as well as the clarity of his works. In contradistinction to Bach, he never locked himself into any particular form, melodic, or chord structure. Beethoven was really the first of the romantic musical visionaries and he had to revise and evolve his structural and melodic ideas to conform to his musical visions. The differences between Bach and Beethoven captivated me and it showed me there were many ways to perceive the world, musically and in the broader spectrum of all of life’s affairs. This was especially important to me as one who needed the exploration of new concepts of reality to properly define my own existence and evolve towards new experiences.

One thorny problem of my school life was the need for integration of the varied elements of my life into a normal class schedule. For example, if I had a seizure or visions I would never take a day off for recovery, I would tough it out and damn the consequences. Bear in mind, I had long since ceased discussing my seizure disorder with anyone, a habit begun in grammar school and one I had no intention of breaking. Fortunately, the grand mal seizures were in remission, leaving in their wake the “simple partial” manifestations of epilepsy. These latter seizures are rarely detectable by those witnessing them.

As El Camino is a junior college, it was required that I take various general education classes in addition to those in my major field. Although I encountered difficulties with courses dealing with subjects outside of my beloved music, I worked hard to achieve academic success. It must have worked because after the first year I had a scholastic Midas touch. Auditioning with fourteen other young musicians for the campus’ most prestigious vocal group, I was selected to fill a slot in the baritone section of the school chorale. Our travels to statewide competitions were extremely successfully, with us slaying them in the aisles in the best vaudeville tradition, always leaving them wanting more. Our chorale became one of the best known of that era and introduced me to the inner circles of music in the Los Angeles area.

Our chorale rehearsed seven days a week, long hours but experience that proved invaluable to my comprehensive education. Besides my choral work I played violin for the school orchestra and also enrolled in a class on chamber music. For once, life was wonderful, all music, music, and more music still.

After graduation from junior college I continued my education at Long Beach State University to work towards my bachelor's degree in music. Now in regular college, my courses were almost entirely music related. Once I was ensconced in my classes, I rounded out my activities by joining the university orchestra and landing a job playing at a piano bar. With all ends tied down, I settled down to enjoy the life of an *artiste*.

It was during this period that I met and married my first wife, a lady with the interesting name of Dean, to whom I had been introduced at church. She was something of an enigma to me from the moment we had met and this was a powerful inducement in my decision to take her as my wife. She was beautiful, long legged, and had a graceful form, but there was an elusive dark quality about her soul. She, too, was concealing a painful past and I doubt if I ever really knew her or if she ever grasped the reality of who I was.

The first time I saw Dean she was wearing a soft white dress and large belt and white three-inch heels. Her hair was styled short and she had gray eyes. Her looks stunned me into speechlessness. She was surrounded by a clutch of male admirers who appeared to be waiting on her hand and foot, something like Scarlett O'Hara at the Twelve Oaks barbeque. For some reason she was attracted to me and if she hadn't been nothing would have transpired between us, as intimidated by her as I was, it would have been impossible for me even to approach her.

When Dean and I established contact apart from the church, I was in college and playing at a piano bar in Redondo Beach. I don't know if that made me seem exotically dangerous and desirable to her nor did I care. All I knew was that I wanted her. We dated sporadically for a few months, then one night went to a coffee house in the Fairfax district, a place called The Garrett, for espresso and folk music. Appearing that night was The Garrett's owner, Terry Lee, a woman with a wonderful voice and a fine hand with an acoustic guitar. Her music was powerful and passionate. While Terry was singing a love song, I kissed Dean, causing Terry to stop the song and direct the spotlight to shine on us. It was all done in good spirits and was part of a nice evening that concluded with a long drive along the beach. Dean wanted to park and take in the spectacle of the beauties of ocean and full moon, which she did before our full scale make out session. Our stay at the beach lasted until two o'clock the next morning.

After that we saw one another on a regular basis. She was an avid reader, which gave her something to do while I practiced my violin or composed music. Dean secured a position as a medical transcriber in Beverly Hills and would spend her after work hours at my place. We would talk about music (which I don't think she really cared about) and make love.

We married in 1967 immediately after my graduation from El Camino College and she supported me through my studies at Long Beach State. Our passionate love began to fade after the first year of married life and we pretty much lived our own separate lives until we finally

broke up. Again, she was a complete mystery to me. The relationship that had begun so lovingly just seemed to wither away as time went on. By the time I graduated from Long Beach State, we were finished. Several factors were involved.

Dean had had nothing comparable to my music with which to fill her own emptiness. She never spoke of the source of her pain and, frankly, I was too wrapped up in my own to be of much help to her. There was a tacit agreement between us that neither would ever try to cross the barrier we both felt existed between us, thus we never communicated about anything of importance.

Compounding this, I was called up for active military duty on several occasions and had to absence myself from home months at a time to meet my service obligations. Our relationship seemed to be ringed by forces dedicated to its failure.

Further, I had been directing all my energies into obtaining my degree and keeping my interior life under some semblance of control. This allowed me to dedicate very little time to Dean and our problems. I was perhaps caught up in the fact that all aspects of my life seemed to be working well and success attended my every effort. My time had come and I was looking towards the future with confidence.

It would be years before I learned she had been the victim of childhood molestation, perpetrated by her father, and the effect upon her psyche was the same guilt, humiliation, and pain that I had needlessly been made to endure as an epileptic. We never got back into contact following the break up of our short relationship. I do still have a wedding picture depicting the two of us standing near my car just before we left on our honeymoon. Her bright eyes were filled with hope for our future and I was displaying my awe that this beautiful woman had consented to be my wife. Another moment lifted out of eternity and entombed in three-dimensional form.

My graduation from Long Beach State was in 1971 and all the problems and struggles were recognized as actually having been for something when I was handed my bachelor's degree in Music Composition.

Then, quite rapidly, life seemed to take a turn down yet another long dark tunnel as my seizures started up again, slowly but surely coming to exercise dominance over me. Within a few short years I would fall from whatever grace I had managed to achieve for myself and plummet to the bottom. The clock was ticking.

Maybe Dean did the right thing after all, leaving me while she could.