# Through the Eye of the Tiger

*The Rock 'n' Roll Life of Survivor's Founding Member*

By Jim Peterik with Lisa Torem

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## CHAPTER ONE
## RISING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

The phone call that shook my world came on an otherwise ordinary day, the way life-altering events usually do.

The ’77 VW Scirocco I had just picked up from a repair shop in Maywood, Illinois, should have had a Sunkist logo on it —that lemon had left me stranded all over the U.S. But now the old junker was finally fixed, and after a long afternoon fielding traffic, I pulled into the driveway of our ranch home on South Stone Avenue in La Grange.

I walked inside and gave way to my everyday ritual. I pressed “play” on my enormous answering machine.

“Jim, give me a call, it’s Alice Anne. What are we getting Mother for her birthday?” *Click.*

As I casually listened I laid my shoulder bag on the counter, and started shuffling through the mail. Lotsa junk mail as always.

Next: “Jim! Salzman. You gotta hear the new one by Rundgren. It’s sick. Call me.” *Click.*

I picked up a Les Paul Gibson and started idly picking. I was tired and only half-listening when I pressed the button to retrieve one last call.

“Hey, yo, Jim. That’s a nice message machine you got there. This is Sylvester Stallone. Give me a call. 213…” *Click.*

*Rewind. Click.* “Hey, yo, Jim. That’s a nice message machine you got there…”

*Rewind. Click.* “Hey, yo, Jim. That’s a nice…”

Time froze and I gathered my thoughts. Maybe it was a gag. It’s true that we had formed a new group, Survivor, and that by early 1982 we had established a good reputation with two albums under our belt. We had also toured with the likes of Jefferson Starship, Kansas, and Triumph. But, Stallone? What would he want with me?

Was it even Stallone? Or could it have been Sal, our Italian road manager, doing a dead-on impersonation? I had to find out. But first, I called up Frankie Sullivan, the lead guitarist in Survivor, and told him to come over right away. I explained that I thought I had just gotten a call from Sylvester Stallone!

Frankie came right over and we strategized. We manned two separate phones; I dialed the Los Angeles number and we got a quick response. “Yo!”

“Is this Sylvester Stallone? This is Jim Peterik and Frankie Sullivan of Survivor.”

“Yeah, but call me Sly,” he answered.

“Okay, Sly,” I stammered.

Speaking in his now trademark Philly accent he told us about a new movie he had just shot. It was the third in the Rocky series, *Rocky III*. The film was now finished except that they still needed to choose the music.

I hurriedly scrambled to find a piece of paper to write on until my hand landed on the *Beatles Songs Easy Piano Series: Volume One* songbook that Karen had been playing. I grabbed the thin book, still focused on every word Sly was saying, flipped it over to a mostly blank

backside, and started scribbling notes as he spoke. I was jotting words, phrases, and concepts even as we went along. I wrote around another long-forgotten song I was working on called "Take These Memories" and put his phone number down next to the name Syvestor (sic) Stallone!

"Tony Scotti [CEO of Survivor's label, Scotti Brothers] played me your song, 'Poor Man's Son.' (It was a cut off of our 1981 release *Premonition*.) That's the sound I want for my movie's title song. It's raw, it's street. It's got energy and it's got exactly what I need. Do you think you can help me out?"

By this time I felt like I was levitating and looking down at the room from a hundred feet.

"Ummm. Absolutely," I answered.

Sly added, "I want something for the kids, something with a pulse. I'm going to send you the first three minutes of the movie. That's the montage. That's where I need the song."

He went on to explain that he had tried to obtain the rights to use "Another One Bites the Dust" by Queen for that spot, but they had refused to grant him the license. *Thank you, Queen!* I thought to myself.

"That's the song you'll hear on the rough cut I'm going to send you. That's the one to beat, but I can only send you the first three minutes. The rest is top secret," Sly intoned.

*Click.*

I stared at the music book. The thing looked like it had been caught in a brainstorm. Ideas, both random and dictated, spread from top to bottom and side to side. I recently rediscovered this artifact and it immediately took me back to that day. That pivotal moment.

I looked over at Frankie, he was half grinning, half in shock, and we slapped each other five. This was the chance we had been waiting for.

Frankie was a young, unproven guitar hotshot from the industrial town of Franklin Park, Illinois, and I was already a conquering warrior fighting on the frontlines of rock 'n' rollrock 'n' roll for fifteen years, looking for my next victory. As band members and individuals we were ready for what might turn out to be our defining moment. We agreed that Rocky Balboa's story was a lot like ours: Against the odds, a band on a small label tries to fell the giants, Foreigner, Journey, Kansas, and other melodic rock heavyweights.

That afternoon I went out and rented a pro Betamax player—a then state-of-the-art video machine that was about the size of a small refrigerator. I hooked it up on the kitchen counter and waited for FedEx. When the tape arrived at my doorstep the next day I called Frankie to come over quick and we wasted no time loading it in.

Here I was, at the ready, my white Les Paul electric guitar casually slung around my neck waiting for lightning to strike. Suddenly, the kitchen was charged with electricity. The Mohawk-headed Mr. T rose up like the commanding threat he would soon become; his dramatic entrance was contrasted by Stallone resting on his laurels doing Master Charge commercials and enjoying the spoils of his success. This quick-cut, film montage was accompanied by "Another One Bites the Dust" by one of our favorite bands, Queen.

I rolled my eyes and wondered out loud how we were going to beat that masterstroke of a song. Queen's smash hit seemed to work so perfectly. We watched it again, this time with the sound off. That's when I started playing that now familiar, muted, sixteenth-note figure: digga digga digga digga digga digga digga and then started grabbing chords from thin air; C minor, B flat major, C minor. Then C minor, B flat major, C minor, C over G, A flat. Repeat. The slashes seemed to coincide with the punches being thrown. I even put one slash in an unorthodox beat to match a punch. This irregular beat would become the scourge of drummers for all time! Later in my career, when I'd audition a drummer, if he couldn't grasp this weird measure I knew he was probably not gonna cut it.

At just the right moment, without saying a word, Frankie and I headed for the piano room at the front of the house. This very cozy, yet inspiring room held my small, but growing guitar collection, which hung on the wall. A beautiful Ibach grand piano took up a good portion of the tiny room. (I still have that piano—it's lucky.)

Frankie switched to guitar and I dashed over to the piano. I hammered out a chord progression that was actually quite R&B inflected. Frankie held down the fort with the rhythm we had established. Now, we had the groove and some of the chords, but then we hit a wall.

What was this movie about? How does it end? What should be the focus of this song? We called up Sly and begged him to send us a rough cut of the entire movie. He reluctantly agreed to do so but only under the condition that we send it back the very next day, overnight delivery.

The entire *Rocky III* movie arrived by FedEx the next morning. We sat there spellbound as we watched the dazzling action and humorous yet meaningful dialogue. It was filled with soon-to-be-famous Stallone catchphrases: "Go for it!" "Knock you into tomorrow!" Then we heard it: the Big Hook. Rocky Balboa's trainer, played by the gravelly-voiced actor Burgess Meredith, tells the main character, "Rocky, you're losing the eye of the tiger." Bingo. There was our title, the focus of our game-changing smash.

The next day, we reconvened. We sat in the music room wondering where this lyric could start. Frankie broke the ice. He mumbled, "How about, 'Back on the street, doing time, taking chances'?"

I liked the sound of those words. I thought about the script and Rocky's quest to stay on top. I countered with, "How about this? 'Rising up, back on the street, did my time, took my chances.'"

We had our start. From there the lyrics just seemed to flow with the storyline. The next few days as I jogged (an every morning ritual) I sweated out words and phrases.

"So many times, it happens too fast, you trade your passion for glory" Yeah, great line. I would recite it into my Radio Shack cassette recorder. "Don't lose your grip on the dreams of the past; you must fight just to keep them alive." Yup, that'll work, too.

When I had the bulk of the lyric and Frankie's approval, we booked time at Chicago Recording Company (CRC) to record the demo. We rounded up Marc Droubay, our drummer, and Stephan Ellis, on bass, who were both living in a house that my wife, Karen, and I owned at

the time. Stephan obviously didn't understand the magnitude of the project. In fact, I remember how he groused about going down to the studio just to record "some movie music."

The guys heard the song for the first time as I was pounding it out on the Yamaha grand piano in studio A. We set up the drums in the storage room in back of the studio to get that raw, ambient, John Bonham–style sound. The Led Zeppelin drummer was Marc's main influence. You could hear it in his attack.

When it was time to record, Frankie sat in the control room next to our engineer, the late Phil Bonanno, to make sure the sounds were going down right. Frankie's great set of ears always helped us get the most out of an engineer and a studio.

We found a click tempo, which is like a metronome that we would hear in our cans (headphones) to keep our tempo steady. We were concerned because the tendency for most musicians is to rush the tempo. In this song, that outcome would have been deadly.

As soon as we lit into the song I felt the surge of magic. Oh, my God! Marc laid down the groove with four on the floor, the kick drum pounding on every beat and the jackhammer snare that Frankie and Phil had dialed in just right. Steph laid down the steady plod with his amazing pick style, and, on piano, I supplied the expansive chording; my goal was to fill out our song and make it move.

Survivor's lead singer, Dave Bickler, did not know the song well enough yet to sing a guide vocal so we just kept the melody in our heads as we played. The second take was magic. It felt like history was going down; we were achieving a solidity of sound I had never heard before and rarely since.

Frankie declared it was a "take" and we filed into the control booth for a very loud and powerful playback. The overdubs went quickly the next day. I laid down the sixteenth-note digga-digga-digga muted guitar figure to the bottom using my white, Les Paul Custom running through my 1959 Fender Tweed Bassman amp and an Electric Mistress chorus effect—this device mimics the sound of an electric twelve-string—then I meticulously doubled this part, which Frankie panned far left and right in the stereo spread to make it sound huge.

Now it was Frankie's turn. He did the first two passes on a tobacco sunburst Les Paul, which he christened "Firewood," through his Marshall fifty-watt half-stack. Then, he layered on top two tracks of Fender Stratocaster to give shimmer to the raw slabs of power guitar. (A few years later at a music/tennis event, the amazing Alan Parsons asked me how the hell we got that incredible guitar sound. Do you think I told him?)

Two days later it was Dave's time to shine. He sang as if his life depended on it.

"It's the eye of the tiger, it's the thrill of the fight,
rising up to the challenge of our rival
and the last known survivor
stalks his prey in the night,
and he's watching us all with the
eye…of the tiger."

Dave hit that high E on the word "eye" and made this one of the most exhilarating moments of my life and in rock 'n' roll history. Everyone in the control room cheered as he walked in for the first playback. No one else could have sung that song as well as Dave. He was born for that performance.

When we sent the rough mix to Stallone, he responded, "Yeah, you guys really did it! This is exactly what I was looking for. But you got a little lazy on me. You forgot to write me a third verse!" On the original demo, we had Dave repeat the first verse a second time in the third verse slot.

So now it was back to the drawing board. After discussions with Frankie, we decided to cheat a bit and grab pieces of the first verse and alternate with new lines. Stallone loved our job of self-thievery.

"Rising up, straight to the top, had the guts, got the glory. Went the distance, now I'm not gonna stop. Just a man and his will to survive." (In a recently discovered notebook I found that one of my trial lyrics for the first line of the final chorus was, "Rising up, ready to spring!" Ouch!)

I was not totally surprised when "Eye of the Tiger" went on to hit number one on the Billboard charts and stayed there for seven weeks, or that it would sell five million records in its first year and 30 million to date. Hell, we had a 10 million dollar video titled *Rocky III* to promote it!

What amazes me most is that this song remains alive and well—stronger, it seems with every passing year. It continues to be a thread in the fabric of millions of lives and it has motivated so many to go beyond their perceived limitations and achieve more than they ever could imagine.

Over the years, "Eye of the Tiger" has given focus and strength to athletes. It has helped people rise from wheelchairs and walk and it has been part of the soundtrack to the lives of so many individuals from all walks of life.

It seems as if every generation discovers it and claims the song as its own. Truly, in my case, destiny began with a phone call and changed a thousand destinies along the way. It certainly changed mine forever. Now when people ask what comes first for me, the words or the music I answer, "Neither. First comes a phone call…in my case—from Sylvester Stallone."

## CHAPTER TWO
## EVER SINCE THE WORLD BEGAN

I had a very cool childhood. Not only was I the youngest child, I also held the status of being the only boy. Nobody knew I was coming. I was a complete surprise. Everyone thought I'd come out as Barbara—they already had a name picked out for me!

I was treasured. I felt completely valued by my parents and sisters. Some people only talk about self-esteem, but I knew that I was special because my family made me feel that way. My earliest memory was being bathed in a white wicker bassinet, which was located right off the kitchen. That shared experience was so special—my whole family smiling and cooing at me was pretty seductive stuff. I think that's why I became a performer. I always loved the feeling of being the center of attention.

When I was about three-years-old I walked into the living room where my parents and sisters were cooing over a newborn baby that a relative of ours had brought over. I surveyed the situation with disgust and before storming out the front door to the porch, I muttered, "Why don't you do something more important rather!" I didn't quite understand the explosion of laughter I heard as I slammed the door. You see, only I could be the center of attention. The next day I complained about a stomach ache. I received so much concern and attention that I complained of one almost every day after that, to the point that my family took me downtown to the tallest building in Chicago at the time, the Prudential Building, for a raft of allergy tests. As the fine needles scratched my back for about an hour I was suddenly very sorry I had created the great stomach ache hoax.

My older sisters, Alice Anne and Janice, ten and twelve years older, respectively, were the typical 1950's teenagers, wearing all the latest styles: fleece poodle skirts, tight angora or cashmere sweaters, faded jeans rolled up to the knee and capri slacks with the zipper in the back (still love those). Janice was a bleach blonde, Alice Anne a brunette. They alternated hairstyles between Audrey Hepburn short and Lauren Bacall long.

Music was a huge part of my early years. My sisters, I realize now, had impeccable taste in music. They loved Johnny Cash. The country star with the oak barrel whiskey baritone became my first real influence after the girls had brought home these yellow label 45s, manufactured by the Memphis-based Sun Records. I loved "I Walk the Line," "Train of Love" and "I Still Miss Someone." I didn't know it then, but it was the stripped-down simplicity and raw honesty that spoke to my emerging sensibilities.[1]

These little records would churn at forty-five revolutions per minute around the big spindle of the then-revolutionary RCA Victor record changer, which sat proudly on top of the Peterik family's blond-cabinet black-and-white Zenith television set. You would stack up to eight records on the chubby spindle and marvel as the records dropped one by one.

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[1] My passion for those old Sun Records sides of Johnny Cash extended forward to 1966 when I convinced The Ides Of March to work up and record a Byrds-influenced rendition of Johnny's "Train of Love." It was recorded at the same session that spawned "Roller Coaster" and is only being released now on The Ides' 50th Anniversary set.

My parents, of course, had their own records, but their tastes consisted of real cornball stuff that I dreaded. There were, however, one or two records of theirs that I could not get enough of. One was Dean Martin's "Memories Are Made of This" and the other a divine instrumental called "Skokiaan" by Ralph Marterie. I found myself gravitating to that major key melodic stuff, though it would be years until I would see the impact in my own writing.

It was the heartfelt and beautiful melodies that always got me. "Big Rock Candy Mountain" enchanted me. This blue vinyl 45 had all of these different cowboy hits on the sleeve, and because I knew that "Big Rock Candy Mountain" was the third cut, I would position myself in my favorite armchair so I could anticipate the cowboy three-part harmony and the lyric I learned by heart: "Oh the buzzing of the bees and the cigarette trees…" (seriously!) "The soda water fountain…." I would let these great melodies seduce and wash over me again and again. Today when I relive these moments there is a chemical reaction inside me that sets off the exact vibration complete with sounds, smells, and intense feeling. (I described that phenomenon many years later in a song I wrote for Lisa McClowry, "Time Signatures"—those sensory cues being the signature of time.)

I liked the spooky tunes, too. There was something very seductive when Art and Dotty Todd cooed "Chanson D'Amour" especially when they went "ra da da, da da"—goose bumps. When I heard the intro to "Mr. Sandman" by the Chordettes I had a brand-new physical reaction. As the girls were singing, "Mr. Sandman, bring me a dream, make him the cutest that I've ever seen" in that sugar-sweet three-part harmony I felt something angular in my pants— something hard and boney. Something strange yet somehow wonderful. I listened to that song a lot just wondering what to do with that protuberance.

Certain other songs through the years had what Neil Young calls "the spook" and had that same effect on me: "Runaway" by Del Shannon, "Sealed with a Kiss" by Brian Hyland, "(The Man Who Shot) Liberty Valance" by Gene Pitney (written by my future songwriting heroes Burt Bacharach and Hal David), "Scotch and Soda" by the Kingston Trio, "Beyond the Sea" by Bobby Darin, "Come Softly to Me" by the Fleetwoods, and yes, predictably, "Spooky" by the Classics IV.

As much as I loved Johnny Cash, he had to play second fiddle when Janice brought home a black-labeled disc with a phonograph and a dog pictured on the label by an artist with a very odd name: Elvis Presley. He had a rawness that just got to the roots of my soul! This is what I had been waiting for. Then when my sisters and I huddled around the "shmee-vee" (my mother enjoyed degrading the TV with that flippant nickname) to watch Elvis on *The Ed Sullivan Show* one fateful Saturday night, I knew that's who I wanted to be. After that day I hound-dogged my parents until they bought me every Presley single they could find: older releases on Sam Phillips' Sun Records such as "Milk Cow Blues Boogie," "Baby, Let's Play House," "I Don't Care If the Sun Don't Shine" and "Good Rockin' Tonight."

Then Alice Anne brought home this giant record with a little hole in it. I had never seen an LP before. "LP" stood for "long playing" and it had not one but up to six songs per side. This purchase coincided with my mom and dad purchasing a freshly minted RCA portable record

player. It was maroon red and had speakers built in. It sat on a functionally beautiful gold metal stand. I stared at it in total awe as the arm went down on our very first LP: Elvis Presley's first album.

As I listened I devoured the cover with pink letters that screamed out Elvis Presley. There he was, live onstage, with his guitar slung around his neck, mouth open so wide you could practically see his tonsils. On the back he was wearing a black-and-white polka-dotted scarf. My sisters and I would gaze and listen almost obsessively 'til we knew every word of each song on that album: "I'm Counting on You," "Blue Suede Shoes," "Tutti Frutti" (I knew this version way before hearing Little Richard's original), the wonderfully playful "One-Sided Love Affair," and the super-tough "Trying to Get to You."

One day my sisters brought home "Love Me Tender." I put that record on, and suddenly it seemed as if Elvis was singing right into my ear. I don't know how to describe what I was feeling, but it was very, very intimate. I found out years later that beside the emotion that Elvis put into the delivery, he was recorded absolutely "dry"— that is, without any of the tape slap echo that producer Sam Phillips typically used on his voice. In this dry state it was as if Elvis was right in the room with you, singing into your ear.

When I was three or four my family started going on summer vacations. We'd drive down to Ft. Myers, Florida to visit my mother's brother, Uncle Raymond and Auntie Florence, who ran one of those soft-serve ice cream stands called the Dairy Dream—kind of a Tastee-Freez wanna-be. We'd hit the interstate, head across the endless miles of cornfields of Southern Illinois, and gradually ramble through the steaming heat of the southern states. As we'd wind through the Smoky Mountains, Alice Anne and Janice would take out their ukuleles from the trunk. One was a mahogany Gretsch, which I still have to this day and the other was a blond Regal that, unfortunately, has long since disappeared.

In the backseat my sisters and I would sing camp songs, such as "The Happy Wanderer" (better known by its chorus chant: "valderee, valderah"), "Smile Awhile," and "Let the Rest of the World Go By." Perhaps our favorite sing-along was "Bye Bye Love" and "All I Have To Do Is Dream" by our beloved Everly Brothers. As I'd sing I'd bite my inner cheeks to simulate their gaunt, sunken cheek look. Our repertoire consisted of the same six or seven songs that we would sing over and over again. I felt secure and loved in the arms of family. Those days are some of the best times of my life.

I first found myself drawn to the ukulele when I was about four years old, but when I picked it up, my hands couldn't even wrap around the neck of the instrument. Then, at about four-and-a-half, when my hands grew bigger, I could finally grasp it and firmly place my fingers around the neck to form a chord. I was jubilant!

Janice and Alice Anne taught me the basic chords: C, G, F and E minor, which allowed me to strum and sing a tune called "Maybe," made popular by the Chantels in '56. I played that song over and over again and drove my parents to distraction as my sisters giggled.

Then, I learned the other songs they were so fond of singing: "Jada" and "Has Anybody Seen My Gal?" ("Five foot two, eyes of blue. But, oh! what those five foot could do…"). To this

day I can play all of those songs and wow my friends at parties or events. When my sister Janice died, Alice Anne and I played our ukes at the wake and sang a bittersweet, slightly out of tune version of "Let the Rest of the World Go By."

That was the beginning of my musical journey: singing three-part harmonies with Janice and Alice Anne and strumming those ukuleles in the backseat while my parents bickered in the front seat.

"You're going too fast, slow down. Do you have to be the first car on the highway all the time?" griped my mom, Alice. But she knew the answer: of course! Ninety-five mph was the typical speed for one of our trips down south.

We didn't care, though. My sisters used to try to "pants" me in the back seat, hit me, kick me, tickle me, and of course, I loved every minute of it.

"Stop, it girls! Jimmie, would you rather be up here with us or tortured in the backseat with your sisters?"

My answer was simple: "Tortured in the backseat with my sisters!" You see, this wasn't torture at all. Having all that attention focused on me set the stage for my strong desire, obsession if you will, to be a performer.

## CHAPTER THREE
## CAPTURING MEMORIES FROM AFAR

I always craved the spotlight. As time went on, I became more and more comfortable in the limelight, and then actually needed it to feel like myself.

My sisters, in a way, were the ones who raised me. With my dad busy at work adjusting relays at our local telephone company, Automatic Electric, and my mother doing community work (she volunteered at the Piggy Bank Thrift Shop, a resale store that sold donated clothes and items) in South Berwyn, it fell to my sisters to mind "Fatboy," as they often called me. My belly was so big at age five that I used to lift it up and throw it down like I saw the bullies do in the cartoons I loved. It was the move they'd make when they came "harrumphing" into the room. Because of the many years between us, I was like an only child, but they made me feel like a golden child. I had so much more in common with them than with my parents. They made me feel loved and they doted on me. They laughed at my jokes and treated me like a rock star even before I learned to play the guitar.

My parents made me take piano when I was seven. God, did I hate practicing! Mr. Ulrich was my unfortunate tutor. He was ancient and smelled like mothballs. I was never prepared with my lesson and one day he finally looked me straight in the eye.

"You really don't want to do this, do you?"

"Uhh, not really, Mr. Ulrich," I stammered.

When my Uncle Raymond would visit, my mom would say, "Show your uncle what you've learned on piano." I would reluctantly play my scales, but when he started yawning I realized that this wasn't cool. Then Alice Anne would launch into "Clair de Lune" and Uncle Raymond would be all smiles. Piano lessons were a chore. I wanted to play songs!

Just like my dad before me, I'm an ear person. I never liked reading those ants on the page called "notes." Never cared about theory or avoiding parallel fifths (apparently a no-no in classical composing). I quit piano lessons after one long year at the ripe old age of eight. By that point, I knew enough to work out the chords and simple melodies on my own. Soon I began to fashion those chords into primitive songs. I would perform those four or five simple chords mimicking another of my early rock 'n' roll heroes, Jerry Lee Lewis, which included standing up and kicking away the piano bench as I'd seen him do on TV.

I developed a style that is known as a "writer's piano." For me the piano is mainly a tool for writing songs. The keyboard for me has always been more about mood than technique or fast runs. A few years later I'd use the guitar in a similar fashion to bring out the rock side of my songwriting.

There's something so peaceful about sitting down at the piano because it speaks to my soul and inspires me to write about romance and beauty. When I want to rock, though, I crank up the guitar through a Marshall amp and feel a different kind of majesty.

Janice and Alice Anne were polar opposites. Janice was the popular girl in high school. Even though I was twelve years younger, I kind of sensed that she was hot stuff. Very attractive, very happening, and smartly dressed in her form-fitted skirt and cashmere sweater, Janice

collected a closet full of the latest styles and a dazzling array of boyfriends. She actually modeled dresses for fashion shows for the upscale Wieboldt's department store in Oak Park, Illinois, where she also sold lady's hats.

Not that Alice Anne wasn't popular, but she was more conservative and perhaps not the trendsetter that Janice was. For some reason Alice Anne did not really resemble the rest of the family. Once when we grouped together for a family photo in Miami Beach the photographer shooed her aside shouting, "You, at the end. Just the family, just the family!"

Janice had a mad crush on a high school dropout named Al Kovarik, a slick-looking, James Dean type of guy from the tough Chicago suburb of Cicero. He was my favorite of all her boyfriends because he looked cool and drove a '56 chartreuse and black Mercury Monterey convertible complete with spotlights, blue-dot taillights, and power windows. He would take me and Janice out cruising, some nights stopping at Big Boy, a burger drive-in on the main drag on Ogden Avenue in Berwyn. He'd let me order a double Big Boy and a chocolate milkshake… once he even took us to the drive-in movie way out on Cicero Avenue to see *Apache*. I drove them both crazy putting the power windows and power antenna up and down all night long as they were trying to make out.

Sadly, Janice made decisions with her heart, not her intellect, and her boyfriends tended to be left of center, non-traditional types.

She married the last in that line, a burly trucking magnate whose name could be seen silk-screened on the gravel trucks going to and from the local limestone quarry in Lyons. One of his big Mack trucks bore the name "Miss Janice" on the hood. But things were far from rosy between them and Mother and Dad had to intervene when Janice wanted a divorce. (In my parents' day people mated for life! Divorce was a sin.)

Perhaps because of the marital discord, Janice became a closet drinker, hiding bottles of wine all around the house and spending time in rehab centers. I remember as a child feeling powerless at calming the battles that raged between them. Even though her husband loved her and funded her every whim (archeological digs, her vast collection of African art), money could not make up for a certain emptiness and growing aggression between them.

A lifetime chain smoker, Janice finally found peace on December 20, 1994 when she succumbed to emphysema-induced heart failure at age 57, leaving behind a heart load of precious memories.

She came to me in a vivid dream the day after she passed. "Jimmie, don't worry about me. It's wonderful here." In my reverie she was restored to the teen queen Janice in her cashmere sweater and pearls long before life got the best of her. From that dream on I felt totally at peace.

Poor Alice Anne (nicknamed "AA") was often the brunt of my mother's sharp-tongued sarcasm, saying she looked like an Indian squaw while Janice would always come out unscathed. If Mom's tactics created competition between the two of them, I sure never saw it. All I saw was a lot of love between them.

The contrast between Janice and Alice Anne was never more apparent than on the family 8-millimeter movie clip where Alice Anne couldn't stay upright for even a millisecond on her

water skis. She kept falling hilariously right back into the water being dragged along helplessly by the speeding boat. Next, the grainy film showed Janice, tan in her bikini, flashing her all-American smile as she glided effortlessly across that same pale, blue lake, skimming the crystal-clear waters with bulletproof confidence, casually waving her free hand.

But Alice Anne is a true gem if perhaps a rough diamond, and to this day my closest friend and soul mate. When Janice passed away in 1994, AA and I closed ranks— a lot of our time together consists of reminiscing and remembering the shimmering spirit that was Janice and those dear old days when it was the three of us just enjoying all life had to offer.

Besides the huge influence of my sisters, my Catholic upbringing had a profound effect. My parents were not extremely religious around the house, but they made sure we went to St. Odilo's Parish for Sunday school. (He must have been kind of an off-brand saint—I have never heard of a St. Odilo then or since…)

When my family went to church, I would tag along. It didn't mean much to me; the priest was just some guy in a black suit droning on about who knows what. At first, the Mass was in Latin. Clear as mud. In Sunday school, I experienced the austere nuns. Their very glance could wither you. It's as if they were taking their whole miserable life out on you.

Sunday school was all about the memorization of the Lord's Prayer, Hail Mary, and the Act of Contrition. After my first communion and confirmation I became defined by guilt. I took to heart that "if you thought about committing a sin, by God, you sinned!"

If I had "impure thoughts" about Laura Strama, that fantasy girl in grade school who always sat in the front of the class, I knew that I was going to Hell. Until, of course I came clean with the man behind the curtain.

Masturbation was a huge no-no. I knew that if I happened to "fall off the wagon" it felt good, and then I felt bad! At that point, of course, I had to fall on the sword and go to confession. If you did masturbate, here's what you had to say:

"Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been two weeks since my last confession and these are my sins: I talked back to my mother, I disobeyed my father, I stole a silver dollar from Jerry Kmen's parents' bedroom (that really happened!), and had impure actions with my body."

The priest must have heard this same scenario a thousand times, and then, in a spooky, disembodied voice, he would dish out my penance: "Say ten Our Fathers, ten Hail Mary's, and make a good act of contrition." (As opposed to a bad one?)

Leaving the confessional, I felt that I had been purged, and then, yippee, I was free to go out and sin again! It was like putting gas in the tank of eternal salvation; you had to do it every couple of weeks or face eternal damnation. I have to admit I felt cleansed at least until real life dirtied me up again.

The negative influence of guilt in my life manifested itself in far-reaching ways. In those days they didn't have initials for what I suffered from as a child. Nowadays my behavior would probably be called obsessive-compulsive disorder. Back in the day, I was just "a boy trying to find himself" as my sixth-grade teacher Mrs. Hull told my folks at the dreaded parent-teacher conference. I was also "a chronic worrier."

"Jimmie, don't you be's a worrier!" my mother would often intone, lapsing into a peculiar soulful dialect. I obsessed about everything: the test coming up on Monday, the project due on Tuesday, and even way back in kindergarten, I stressed out about how I was going to button my smock in art class (finally my mother installed snaps on it thus saving me the humiliation of not knowing how to button a button).

After watching *Dr. Kildare* (starring a very young Richard Chamberlain) or *Ben Casey* (featuring Vince Edwards), two very popular medically-based dramas, I contracted whatever disease was diagnosed that particular episode. One week I was convinced I looked pale and, of course, I concluded that I must certainly have Leukemia.

Another week it was cancer. It was the disease du jour. I staggered between fear of tornados, earthquakes, thunderstorms, and, after I watched the terrifying TV drama *On the Beach*, which depicted the world after nuclear annihilation, I had nightmares of mushroom clouds on every horizon.

In my later years, I worked on divesting myself of this guilt—unlearning all the BS. We're all sinners and we're accepted anyway. Jillian, a Christian artist who I produced, was a great influence, and a great source of consolation.

She would preach the word of the Lord to nondenominational churches all over the country. One day in the car on the way to the studio she asked if I had accepted Jesus into my heart.

I told her that I went to church almost every Sunday. Jillian again asked me if I had accepted Jesus, and I responded that I wasn't good enough; that I'm a sinner and I don't feel worthy enough. She essentially told me that that was nonsense! She said, "We're all worthy of having Jesus in our hearts. Jesus knows we are imperfect. We are forgiven the moment that we sin."

I'm not crazy about the phrase "born again," but in that moment I felt lighter than air. I felt a new energy come over me. I felt like a child again.

We're not perfect, but we're loved anyway. This epiphany eventually formed the basis for my new way of thinking. But religion was not the only influence in my early life; I was also entranced by American popular culture.

When I was about eight years old I was drawn to Charlie Brown, the self-effacing main character in Charles Schultz's comic strip, "Peanuts." Whenever I tagged along with my mom on boring shopping expeditions, I would get lost in the book department of the upscale Marshall Field's department store in Oak Park.

There I was, laughing out loud at the antics of those comic strip characters. Charlie Brown was the underdog, an ordinary kid who tried harder but often fell short. I identified with him, and later the message that I clearly stated in "Eye of the Tiger" reflected his belief system.

Like many kids, I loved Captain Kangaroo, who was an iconic father figure. He was a stocky, kindly man with blond bangs that looked like they had been chopped short with pinking shears around an upside-down cereal bowl. The Captain's soft, reassuring voice was something a kid could count on every morning. The jingling of his keys as he walked was music to my young

ears. My other faves were *Kukla, Fran and Ollie*, *Ding Dong School*, *Garfield Goose,* and a bit later the hilarious Rocky the Flying Squirrel from *The Rocky and Bullwinkle Show*.

Despite my love for those innocent television characters, music still held the trump card. On Halloween, as a kindergartener, I dressed as a pirate, complete with charcoal mustache and plastic sword.

The following Halloween, my dear mother, seeing my infatuation with rock 'n' roll as a whole and Elvis in particular, took it upon herself to apply the name "Elvis" on the front of my ukulele in white surgical tape. When she showed it to me I didn't react the way she expected. I told her that there was no way I would go as Elvis. I felt terrible (and still do) for destroying her expectations after all the time she took putting on that tape. But no matter how she begged me, I was not gonna be a rock pretender. I'd rather go as a pirate again than fake being a rock star.

Every year Hiawatha School would have a Halloween parade. As we would snake through the different classrooms, I felt special because, even though I was just one of the crowd, I had experienced what it felt like to be in the public eye. I liked that feeling—a lot.

Although I looked forward so much to the Halloween parade with my schoolmates, I had other friendships. In my Berwyn, Illinois, neighborhood, I hung around with a pair of great kids, Binky Cihak and Johnny Babinak.

Every kid should have a Binky and a Johnny. Sure, they were a little older, but they were my buddies, and not only did they know a heck of lot about the opposite sex, they would always bring home new records.

Once Binky sent away to the Beechnut Spearmint Gum Contest, and through the mail came a recording of "Great Balls of Fire" by Jerry Lee Lewis. Unfortunately, when it arrived, we found that the record was cracked. The rockabilly singer repeated "great balls of fire" over and over because the record repeatedly skipped. But the message and echo on Jerry Lee's voice rang loud and clear.

When the chorus would hit, Binky and Johnny would lead a sing along, "Goodness gracious, my balls are on fire!"

My parents didn't like these boys one bit. "They're a bad influence, Jimmie. Stay away from them!" They were actually really great kids—just a bit more mature, and sexually aware.

We collected marbles and played them endlessly at the empty lot at the end of the block that we dubbed "the prairie." I still remember the feeling of those babies in my hands as I thumbed them toward the valley we dug in the mud: cat's eyes, cat's eye boulders (the bigger ones), puree's (no colored glass inside), puree boulders, and the heavy steelies and steely boulders. The colors dazzled me: turquoise, coral pink, yellow, orange, and purple.

One day, Binky and Johnny organized a night bike ride. All the boys in the neighborhood made plans to go out in a pack that evening. I could barely contain my excitement until my mother informed me that I couldn't go because I didn't have a light on my bike like the others. I was disconsolate. When my dad got home and was told the situation he quietly affixed our family flashlight to my handle bars with electrical tape, and off I went into the starry Berwyn night. At that moment he reaffirmed his status as my hero.

But our main compulsion was cars. We built scale model, plastic cars, which we raced down the sidewalk. I still remember the somehow seductive smell of the Testors glue we used and the slick flame decals we'd lick and apply carefully to the fenders. Some we would purchase at our local hobby shop, already built, that contained a friction mechanism that kept the car in motion when you gave it a good shove. It wasn't about how fast you could go, but how far we could get them to coast down the sidewalks of Wesley Avenue in front of our houses. If your car made it to the Danda's yellow bungalow you were doing pretty darn good.

Me, Binky and Johnny, with miles of unstructured time each day, would perch on the curb on busy 26th street and report on every car that passed by: "'53 Packard Caribbean—three-tone paint— coral pink, gray and white, two-door hardtop, V8, white walls; '54 Buick Skylark, convertible, wire wheels, whitewalls, V8, no portholes" (the normal Buicks had three or four of these mock portholes on the front fender depending on the prestige of the model). We would talk over one another trying to blurt out the info first.

We didn't much care about the workings of the engine; it was all about flashy design, and color schemes. I'm still a car nut and recently could afford to relive those days by buying myself a mint-condition 1955 Chevy Bel Air convertible and a 1958 Corvette convertible—both in coral red and cream, both with matching interiors and V8 engines and power windows! Someday I'd like to own a 1956 T-Bird (with Continental kit) and a chartreuse and black Mercury convertible—just like Al Kovarik's.

Binky and Johnny and Alice Anne and Janice were my life until I turned seven, and then we moved up in status to a brand-new location only about a mile away. Suddenly, there was a whole new group of kids, and though the new crowd made me feel light-years away from Binky and Johnny, I made new friends and quickly adjusted to my new surroundings. But I always maintained a soft spot for my Wesley Avenue digs—the real cradle of civilization for me.

As I said, 2647 Oak Park Ave. was a move up the social ladder for my folks. There was more money in the Peterik family coffers and my parents wanted to move closer to my Auntie Clara, my mother's twin sister. Auntie Clara was Gracie Allen to my mother's Barbara Stanwyck. They both came from affluence (Mother's father, Jim, was the butcher of choice in Hawthorne), but my mother was all sophistication, and Clara all over the deck. Auntie worked behind the long luncheonette counter at Murphy's five-and-dime in the Berwyn Cermak Plaza. At any given time of day you could hear her shouts resounding though the entire store: "Murphyburger." "Murphyburger Deluxe." I would bring friends there just to have them hear my mother's twin's ear-splitting voice in full song.

Growing up had its challenges. By the time I was eleven, I had become a target for bullies. Maybe it was the black-rimmed glasses with the tape mending the bridge that made me look kind of nerdy or maybe the bullies just decided to pick on me because I was the musician, "the guy in the band." I had started playing in the grade school band with those gaudy uniforms and I felt I was scorned upon by the "hard guys." It seemed they were lurking everywhere in Berwyn and Cicero. One Christmas when I finally got that Schwinn Jaguar bike I had been lobbying for, it wasn't more than two weeks before it was stolen from our garage. After the

police retrieved the bike, it was stolen once again by three thugs who followed me from Cock Robin Ice Cream to G.C. Murphy's where it was stolen for the final time.

My true nemeses though were two brothers, Gary and Tom Booth, good-looking Irish-Catholics who slathered pomade on their combed-back hair. These boys had lots of swagger and got kicked out of school constantly for truant behavior and failing grades. They tried to make up for their lack of discipline and antisocial tendencies by becoming the kingpins of their own amateur gangster world.

Their henchman, Mike McKenzie, was way nerdier than I was, but since he aligned himself with the "Booth Boys," his status grew. He became "their guy," their lackey. Mike McKenzie had wisely bought himself protection.

One day, I was shooting baskets in my driveway when Mike McKenzie yelled, "Hey, want to take a walk to the park with me?"

"Yeah," I said, excitedly.

Here was this cool henchman who wanted to hang with me. I glanced at the huge beds of colored, dried autumn leaves that were piled up high. Not only was it a gorgeous fall day, but also I was finally being accepted and appreciated for the cool guy I really was. One of the Booth Boys had shown up at my house to meet me!

But when we reached the park, my luck changed. Mike McKenzie shoved me into another pile of leaves, leaving Tom Booth free to shove his frigid switchblade towards my neck.

"I never want to see you again! Never walk past my house again. If you do, I'll slit your throat," he said, in a threatening tone that I'll never forget.

I shook and trembled as Booth lunged over me, thrusting his silver blade closer to my throat. I managed to croak, "okay" as my young life flashed before my eyes. These hoodlums finally let me go and, though they didn't actually injure me physically, the mental scar will be with me forever.

After that experience, I made great pains to avoid going past that house. I created a whole new route home just to avoid them. From what I heard, the Booths ended up becoming petty criminals. Tom died recently. God only knows where Mike McKenzie is today.

My days being the brunt of bullies came in handy recently when I got a call from an old record company buddy of mine, Bobby Tarantino, who was looking for an antibullying song for the group he managed, Ariel & Zoey & Eli, Too. This group of twin fourteen-year-old girls and their eleven-year-old brother had already made a name for themselves with their own variety show on The Cool TV network. The song I wrote and produced for them, "Hey Bully," would eventually go viral on YouTube with their creative video. Maybe I have the Booth brothers to thank for giving me the ammunition I needed to write that song.

I never used the music as a selling point, though, not until about fourth grade when I picked up the sax and played "Wiggle Wobble," which was a popular tune that year by Les Cooper. When I played it for the class, the girls started giggling. They started looking at me differently. The guys sat silently in awe, looking a tad jealous. My teacher looked surprised. That day my course was set.

## CHAPTER FOUR
## FORTUNES OF OUR FATHERS

My dad, like his father before him, was a natural born musician. He mastered violin in his teens and was known all over the Hawthorne district of Cicero, Illinois, as the best around. He looked like actor Robert Young (the adorably incompetent patriarch in one of my favorite shows, *Father Knows Best*) and became popular with the local girls with his sidewalk serenades.

In the late ’40s he switched to saxophone and formed a group dubbed the Hi-Hatters. Their repertoire consisted of popular standards of the day as well as the required Czech and Polish polkas. I have fond memories of hearing the sweet strains of “Tea for Two” (the group’s opener) as Dad warmed up in the basement workshop of our Wesley Avenue house, which was part of his routine before he left for a “job,” as such gigs were called in those days. His tone and vibrato put chills right through me even from down in the basement. He had that effect on his audience, too, the ladies flocking around the stage to see and hear this handsome sax man. He blew into his sax from the side of his mouth —a very incorrect embouchure to be sure but his sound was spectacular just the same. He was in the best mood as he tinkered in the workshop, oiling the pads and adjusting the action on his Martin tenor and Conn alto saxes.

Sometimes my mother would threaten the sanctity of his warm-up ritual with sharp criticism or chastisement. “Alice, this is my job; I have to be in a great mood,” he’d say. “I can’t play sweet tonight if you’re nagging me about something and putting me in a bad frame of mind!”

In the basement, he stored the bandstands with the words “Hi-Hatters” carved out in vibrant blue and gold. I posed proudly with the whole band in front of one stand the first day I got my very own saxophone. There was my dad, on tenor and alto sax, Joe Delfino on trumpet, Irv on drums and a really talented accordion player named Al Tobias. Later on, Al was kind enough to let me use his amazing Magnatone amplifier with a cool vibrato feature.

For a while, my uncle, George Peterik, played drums with my dad’s band, before he moved to California, and then the band had to change drummers. Though I was too young to remember, they say that that band with the two Peterik boys was a ferocious entity. Irv took his place, but he was no George Peterik, and the musical bond my father and my uncle had developed was gone forever.

By day, Jim Peterik, Sr., was a relay adjustor at Automatic Electric Telephone. I have a picture of him at the desk painstakingly fine-tuning these delicate pieces of gear in his black-rimmed bifocals. Without these relays tuned just right, the telephone of the day would not have functioned properly.

Automatic Electric had a factory parallel to the Eisenhower Expressway, near downtown Chicago. My father soldiered to the bus that took him to the train early each morning, despite the elements. I’d wake up to the familiar farm report blasting from our clock radio, which had become his makeshift alarm.

"The grain is up fifteen points and soybeans are down five," bellowed a voice from the airwaves in a monotonous tone. The voice was loud enough to wake the dead—and my dad and the entire household.

I'm still an early-morning guy, and that is probably because of my dad's impenetrable work ethic and that droning call-to-arms. But these rituals bonded us. Each day when he came home, I would greet him as he ambled down Wesley Avenue from the bus drop-off.

As we'd walk he'd tell me stories about his work buddy "Skinny" who was always doing hilariously stupid things. Sometimes he'd talk about an upcoming job with the Hi-Hatters at the VFW or the Moose Lodge in Blue Island.

When I finally got good enough on sax (around sixth grade), I would tag along with my dad to his various gigs—bar mitzvahs, men's fraternities like the Elks, Lions, or Moose clubs, weddings, anniversary celebrations, and the lot.

For a while they were the featured band at Melody Mill on First Avenue in suburban Riverside. With my alto sax I would hide behind one of the wooden Hi-Hatters bandstands and play harmonies to my dad's sweet tenor sax.

I had no union card and was underage so I kept pretty scarce. By the way, my dad played "by ear." He never learned to read music, but it never held him back. He was equally adept at concertina (like his father) and fiddle, and his ear was deadly accurate, his tone was sweet, his vibrato wide, and his soloing was as good as his hero's, Wayne King, the popular sax player from Wisconsin to whom he was often compared. In some circles he was known as "Young Wayne King."

Another one of my favorite memories was doing a job at the VFW or the Moose Lodge with my dad and his buddies and then going out for White Castle hamburgers. It was the only place still open at midnight when the gig was through. I felt so grown-up, being in sixth grade and hanging with the guys at these gleaming white burger palaces.

I must have meant a lot to my dad. The day after my birth, my dad boasted to Skinny and Zichek, another friend of his from work, on the bench at Automatic Electric that he now had "a son!" It was somehow the validation my dad needed to make his manhood complete. That phrase, "a son," echoed through Berwyn for days to come!

My birth did little, however, to still the constant and accelerated bickering between Alice and Jim, my mom and dad.

"Alice, quit belittling me! You're baiting me again!"

"Jimmie, all you do is lay around the house doing nothing. Can't you be useful? And why do you spend so much time in the bathroom. You've got some magazines in there with some pretty dandy pictures. I can imagine what you are doing!" My mother's intimation of my dad's masturbating in there was not lost on me as I grew older.

"Go jump in the lake!" he would respond, among other unprintable phrases. I got used to the slamming of doors and the feeling that all was not right in the world after all. It shook me to my core. Music became my asylum, my safe house.

As I grew up, I learned how to create a protective shield from the often negative spirit of their marriage. I think it was actually this kind of behavior that made me more determined that I would never be like that. When my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Hull, asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I answered, without hesitation, "a good husband."

For the same reason, I never smoked cigarettes. I had spent one too many Sundays at home tolerating what I called my "Sunday Headache," which I discovered much later came from inhaling secondhand smoke from my father. He chain-smoked unfiltered Camels all day, lighting the next one with the glowing butt of the last one 'til he died of heart failure at the age of seventy.

My mother and dad always seemed distant from one another. It felt as if some dark secret existed between them—as if there was an elephant in the closet that no one saw or at least acknowledged.

When Daphne, my mother's pen pal, visited from Australia we all went to the Brookfield Zoo. Although I was only about eight, I noticed something unusual happening—my mom and dad were holding hands. I had never seen that happen before. They were clearly putting on a show for Daphne.

That simple display of affection was so unlike them. I know there must have been a lot of love there, but there was never any demonstration of it. My parents were not huggers. They didn't hug me, and they didn't hug each other. In fact, it seemed like nobody hugged back then. Still, I never had any doubt that they loved me—unconditionally.

Every time tempers got really hot and my mother needed ammunition, through her sobs, she would lay out her trump card: "It was seventeen years ago (or eighteen, or however many years it had been at the time), Jimmie, but I remember it like it was yesterday."

Many years later, my mother finally cornered me and told me what "it" was. "You think your father is so great —well, let me tell you about the affair he had when we had only been married a few years!"

That encounter didn't change my respect for my father, but it did explain the fights and icy silence between them once and for all. It affected me greatly for years and made me vow not to repeat this pattern of holding onto hurt and using it as a weapon. Inversely, it taught me the vital importance of forgiveness.

My own sexual education was sketchy at best. In sixth grade my buddy Jerry Kmen told me all he knew about the opposite sex. He said something about a girl having "three holes." And the main one was called a "pussy nose." This was before I had my first orgasm so the thought of taking off my clothes in front of a girl sounded just plain embarrassing. He described masturbation but I couldn't quite put all the pieces together.

One day I was at the park with my friends and for some reason I started climbing the poles that supported the swings. When I got near the top I felt a very odd and unfamiliar sensation between my legs. I wasn't sure if it was pleasurable or not at first—just different. The next day, trying to recreate that feeling at the poles, I clearly decided this feeling was good—*very* good. I developed strong muscles after that from climbing those poles almost daily! But I still

didn't put that feeling together with what Jerry Kmen had described 'til one day while gazing at a very sexy cartoon in *Mad Magazine* I figured it all out. Oh, that's what that pole thing was! Little did I know at that time that I'd be chasing that feeling from that moment on.

My parents were no help in the sex-education department. One day my dad handed me a dark green book called *Moving into Manhood*. He kind of averted his eyes as he slipped it to me. After glancing through it I still knew nothing about the actual process of sex. The book said things like, "when the sperm meets the egg..." How the hell does that happen, guys? I still was not quite ready for one of those three holers.

It wasn't 'til I was with The Ides on one of our first road trips (this one to Savanna, Illinois, to play the Road-Runner Den) that I connected all the dots. One of the guys had acquired some grainy black-and-white porn tapes from the '50s and we watched them in our seedy sleeping quarters above the club owner's office on the projector we had brought with us. The men in the films were all Brylcreem, white legs, and black socks. The gals were overweight, pasty white, and over the hill, but at least I saw the act in motion. My line, now famous in the pantheon of Ides of March lore, was, "Hey guys, it's like jagging off—in a girl!" Prior to this I thought you just put it in and waited motionlessly.

For as long as I could remember, my mother had one big dream for me. "Jimmie, you be's a doctor," is what my mother always said. For some reason, she spoke this phrase in a kind of "Porgy and Bess" dialect.

My mom actually had a metal box exclusively earmarked for my post-medical school career. "After each patient, you put the money in," she explained, opening the box and carefully arranging the bills for visual aid. It was never about saving mankind; it was about the money I would make that would go into this strong box.

"You be's a doctor!"

I heard my mother's tirade year after year until, at the age of ten, I could stand it no longer. I finally stood up to her and said, "Mother, let me be what I want to be, okay?" The anxious expression on her face eventually broke into a smile. She finally realized that I was my own man, and she never brought it up again.

That's how I am with my son, Colin, too. I believe that if you raise a child with good values and you set a good example, that example goes beyond words, beyond lectures. I trust him so much that I don't lecture, just as my parents didn't lecture. Nobody ever said, "Jimmie, don't drink and drive. Don't smoke pot." Nobody ever told me that. They knew I wasn't going to go there—it was just that unspoken trust.

My reaction to the stoners and drinkers was, "Why do that?" It was never a temptation. In fact, I think I felt a tiny bit superior because I had the willpower to resist that course.

I've seen too many of my rock 'n' roll brothers fall to drugs. They're some of the most evil substances known to man because they totally take you over, change your personality, and ruin your body. I once had a writing session with the lead singer of a very well-known group from the '70s. He said, "Jim, you know, my problem is that I've never had one great song idea

when I wasn't doing coke." It's a voice inside many of us that says, "I am not enough—I need a crutch." To silence that voice is my everyday challenge.

I tried to tell him that those creative juices are "you;" it's not the work of the drug. You can access those inner chemicals in a natural way by engaging in physical activity, eating right, sharing your talents with others, embracing loved ones, and doing nice things for people. He said, "Yeah, but I still need the coke." This man ultimately lost his wide vocal range and ability to perform onstage.

I've seen way too many examples of this. When I give master classes at a Camp Jam seminar[2], I always tell my cautionary tale of the time The Ides of March were invited to the aftershow party hosted by Led Zeppelin after our triumphant gig opening for them in Winnipeg, Ontario.

Here's what happened. We knocked on the door of the band's hotel suite. (They stayed at the fancy hotel in the area—not the lowly Holiday Inn where we were staying.)

Robert Plant came to the door in his bikini briefs and welcomed us in. As we walked in, we spotted half-naked groupies cavorting on the bed in a pillow fight. Pot was being smoked, cocaine snorted, John Bonham was in a stupor, and booze was everywhere. Jimmy Page was in the bathtub with a young lady going through some uncomfortable-looking contortions.

I looked at Larry (The Ides' rhythm guitarist), Larry looked at Mike (Ides' drummer) and we turned on our heels and said, "Thanks guys, see ya later!" This was not our scene at all. We repaired to a donut shop across the street from the hotel. We were back in our comfort zone.

When I tell that story at a master class, believe it or not, the kids always cheer. I tell them it's probably why I'm still here talking to you right now. You can't keep the party going at all costs.

My own Czech heritage also impacted my childhood. About twice a year, usually to commemorate the day someone had died, we would visit my ancestors at Bohemian National Cemetery on Cicero Avenue and Foster.

Before the age of expressways, this would be a day-long expedition, ending with a feast at one of the authentic Czech restaurants on Cermak Road in Berwyn or Cicero. At the cemetery, we would be spellbound by the elaborate gravestones, which carried hard to pronounce names like Vosacek, Vlcek, Krahulek, and Klitpetko. These names were always dense with consonants.

Nowadays, many American parents take great pains to teach their children their native tongue, but back then, the goal was to assimilate. When my parents didn't want me to understand what they were saying, they would speak in Czech.

They whispered little Czech phrases under their breath when they wanted to be secretive. Though I didn't understand a word they were saying, I could pretty much decipher the meanings by their inflection, tone, and decibel level.

My strongest connection and fondest memory of my Czech heritage was the Bohemian cuisine. My mother mainly prepared Czech food. Dinnertime would become another time during

[2] Camp Jam is the wonderful organization that Jeff Carlisi of 38 Special and Dan Lipson currently run. It's designed to mentor budding musicians, ages nine to sixteen, coast to coast in week-long classes. "No canoes—lots of rock" is their slogan!

which I would get teased and get called "Fatboy." (My mother had to shop with me in the "husky" section of the department stores where you could find any color of corduroy pants you wanted as long as it was brown or navy blue.)

About once a month, the family would go out for an "eating party" (a phrase I apparently coined at age four). Some of our favorite destinations for Bohemian food were Klas in Cicero (the sidewalk in front shimmered with shards of colored glass), Old Prague, and the Dumpling House in Berwyn.

My family bought "bakery" (always used in place of "baked goods") at Vesecky's on Cermak Road (kind of the Rodeo Drive of Berwyn and Cicero). There we'd stock up on *hoska*—wonderful, eggy bread studded with slivered almonds and laced with dark and light raisins.

We'd also buy plenty of *kolaches*: doughy rounds made with cream cheese and targeted with apricot, cheese, and prune fillings, or my favorite: poppy seed. Cermak Road was a street lined with the most savings and loans and banks per block of any one city—Bohemians were a frugal lot, that's for sure.

Little old Czech ladies wearing colorful *babushkas* (scarves) would wheel their shopping carts from butcher to baker. For meats, there was Vlceks (also on Cermak) for your pork loin and chicken and my favorite sausages called *jelitzy* and *Jaternice* or *Jitrnice*.

One was blood-red, barley sausage in a casing; the other was a light-colored veal sausage. You would squeeze it out of the casing (half the fun of it, really) and mix these garlicky, fatty meats with mashed potatoes and gravy. Talk about a triple bypass plate!

Since that time, of course, the area and the demographic have changed radically. The neighborhood is now largely Hispanic. The homes are still meticulously kept, but many of the restaurants now specialize in amazing *flautas* and enchiladas. The population has changed, but the smells are still intoxicating.

A little while back, I took my friend and Facebook guru, Paul Braun, on a walking tour of my old stomping grounds of Berwyn. Paul is not only a great friend, but also a music historian whose grasp of rock history is second to none.

We started with a visit to my first home at 2529 Wesley Avenue; the empty lot that is now a police station; the Tastee-Freez (still there!); and my second abode, the big ritzy house with the ornate stained-glass windows at 2647 Oak Park Avenue. We walked up its stairs and peered through the window. All of the walls had been torn out and "modernized." What a shame.

We walked past Karen Moulik's family home on Clinton where I used to spy through the front window as I passed, hoping to catch a secret glimpse of my future wife. One night I got more than I bargained for: it was Karen's enormous father—"the old water buffalo" as I used to call him—in his undershirt and boxer shorts. What a letdown!

I walked Paul past Hiawatha Grade School where I attended kindergarten and first grade and past the school where much of my maturation took place—Piper Elementary. Three things really stood out during my six-year tenure at Piper Elementary: an amazingly caring teacher named Mrs. (Helen) Hull, who was perhaps the first to recognize my potential as a human being;

Laura Strama, the object of my affections who kept me up nights and provoked my fantasies; and my nemesis, Piper School Principal, Hugh Bittinger.

Exactly three times in third grade (but who's counting!), Laura picked me out of all the other boys to help her take off her shiny, white winter boots! (She would ordain one of us every day in the snowy winter months.) This was an honor too great to be believed. I still remember the smell of that rubber and the feeling of being that close to Laura's calf—that close to any female, for that matter.

Recently, I had lunch with Laura after not seeing her for about forty years. Now I know why I was especially attracted to the American actress, Sandra Bullock—Laura could be her sister.

We caught up on old times and she even remembered those white boots! The last recollection was darker; it had to do with the tenuous relationship that had developed with Mr. Hugh Bittinger.

What a foreboding figure! He stood at six feet, four inches tall with long ape-like arms that hung down well below his knees as he swung through the blackboard jungle of Piper Elementary. Mr. Bittinger had a permanent scowl on his face and a diabetes alert bracelet on his wrist.

He really showed his true colors when one morning he joined in our favorite playground game, kickball. He joined the other team's side to make up for a missing player. As Bittinger rounded the bases to home plate, he was tagged out.

Of course, after I spotted that play, I yelled, "You're out!"

He screamed, "I'm safe, Jim Pet!!"

I repeated, "No, you're out!"

He then came over to me and walloped me hard in the back of the head with his clenched fist. I was knocked dizzy, but managed to run to the nurse's station to report what had happened. You don't expect your bullies to come in the form of school principals.

From that moment on, our relationship changed. Bittinger knew I had the goods on him. When I came up for the honor of the coveted "Boy of the Year" award in eighth grade, he made sure I was taken off the bench and put into action at the last basketball game of the season.

After that game (where I literally fell flat on my face) I now had all the qualifications necessary to be voted "Boy of the Year." The day I won the honor was one of the proudest moments of my life. The plaque still hangs above the water fountain in the gym. I only wish Laura Strama had won the "Girl of the Year" honor, instead of the very bookish and straight Sue Sellars—then we could have ruled our little Czech Camelot together.

Finally, I took Paul past the gas station where AZ & R bowling lanes once stood. Every Friday afternoon, Hugh Bittinger would march the whole eighth-grade class over to the lanes to bowl three games.

One particular Friday afternoon will be eternally engraved in my memory, not for the too-salty hot dogs, Green River soda, or the pungent odor that emanated from the shoe rental counter.

On this day, whether you got a strike or a gutter ball hardly mattered because everything grinded to a halt. A voice on the loudspeaker announced that President John F. Kennedy had been shot.

Everyone from that era remembers exactly what they were doing on that Friday. Grim-faced and disheartened, after having our day of playful innocence violently interrupted, we slipped back into our street shoes, grabbed our winter coats, and slunk, dazed and confused, back to the shelter of our homes.

## CHAPTER FIVE
## A BAD GUITAR AND A SIMPLE SONG

It was not just the intense politics of the day that created a sense of heaviness during this time; there were other tensions in the Peterik household, and, at times, it felt like my only saving grace was my music. When my parents would fight—and that was often—I headed for the asylum of my tiny bedroom and lost myself in the four or five chords I knew on the ukulele. Years later, "In My Room" by the Beach Boys resounded with meaning for me.

Soon the four-string instrument gave way to the guitar. I knew Elvis Presley's guitar had six strings; I cleverly counted them as they appeared on the cover of his iconic first album.

I started begging my parents for a guitar when I was about seven. For Christmas, I finally got my wish. My first guitar was made entirely out of plastic. It was horrible, and it had this device on the neck.You pressed down on one of the buttons of the contraption that was clamped onto the neck and it made chords.

I looked under the chord device to find out which strings had to be held down and on which fret. Then, I would attempt to substitute fingers in order to start making my own chords. I could see that this guitar was just like a ukulele, but with two extra strings. All I really had to do was figure out what to do with the extra two!

I would strum the C chord on the ukulele and play "Love Me Tender" and then play it on the guitar. So that's basically how I learned to play the guitar. I based the guitar chords on the chords I had learned on the ukulele.

By next Christmas, my parents knew I had to move up. My first semi-cool guitar was a Harmony acoustic model with a tacky painted-on sunburst finish— but it was my Stradivarius. I would get up every morning at 6 a.m. and go over and over the basic eight-bar blues progression. I practiced that series of chords so relentlessly that it got to the point that my sister Alice Anne would scream from her slumber, "Shut up with that same progression!"

You forget, after you've been playing for so long, how hard it was at the beginning to hold down those strings when you're first learning your instrument. It took me months to get enough strength to clamp down the strings to the frets and form a barre chord, which is the basis of practically all advanced chords on the instrument.

I was very influenced by a group in this pre-Beatles era, The Ventures, who played wicked instrumentals; kind of surf music meets spy music. They were like a human aurora borealis: they wore matching sharkskin suits and played Fender electric guitars finished in custom colors. When I finally purloined a Fender catalogue from Balkan Music in Berwyn I learned the correct name for these dazzling Duco finishes: Lake Placid Blue, Candy Apple Red, Foam Green, Fiesta Red, Salmon Pink, and, of course, Shoreline Gold.

I would pore over my Fender catalogue for hours on end to view the guitars played by my musical heroes. I can still feel the glossy pages of the book, as the corners brushed across my fingertips; pages filled with images of beautiful, smiling teenagers enjoying their instruments together, on the beach and on the bandstand.

I imagined how it would feel to cradle one of those contoured Stratocasters or Jazzmasters in my arms. I woke up thinking about these immaculate instruments, scheming ways to coerce my folks into buying me one.

I was mesmerized by the steely twang of Don Wilson and Bob Bogle's Fender Stratocasters and Jazzmasters, their use of the vibrato arm to simulate Hawaiian steel guitar sounds, and how they would use the palms of their hands to create a muting effect that deadened the strings and made the sound pop. I also loved the sound of Mel Taylor's snare drum, which he played in rim shot style, thus combining the sound of the drumhead with the sound of the metal rim of the drum. It gave the backbeat a unique metallic gunshot sound that I could not get enough of. I had first heard that sound years before on "Jailhouse Rock." The drum was played to sound like a gunshot ricocheting off the hard prison walls. Nokie Edwards played his sunburst Precision bass with a pick to give the bottom end a powerful snap.

I used to haunt The Balkans music store. It was located on Cermak Road and Clinton Avenue (one block from Karen Moulik's family dwelling—the future Karen Peterik). Balkans was not only known for carrying a broad selection of ethnic sheet music, but it also carried a great array of electric guitars. There was a door that led to an actual recording studio. The big red light flashed "Recording" when a session was in progress. I didn't dare ask the proprietor, Mr. Slavico Hlad, to enter those sacred confines. That was for music pros, not us little kids. One of the store's highlights was a glass case that held the cream of the current guitar crop. I remember a red Gibson ES 355 that stayed there 'til the store closed its doors years later. I wish I'd been the one to finally buy it. Once when I ran in I was stopped in my tracks by an entire wall of Gretsch hollow body electrics. At first, I was riveted by a blood orange model until my eyes caught sight of one finished in a pale green with a darker green back and sides. That one became the focal point of my fantasies. Years later, in Minneapolis on tour with Survivor and REO Speedwagon, I bought a Gretsch just like that one. It was called the Anniversary model, from Pete of Pete's Guitars, one of the several vintage guitar merchants who would meet groups backstage, tempting us with their wares.

Of course, I always had to go home to face my own el-cheapo guitar. Finally, as Christmas was closing in, my dad caved in to my incessant nagging and said, "I think it's time we got you a decent electric guitar."

The accordion player in my dad's band, Al Tobias, did business with a store on the legendary music row down on south Wabash Street in downtown Chicago. That store imported not only fine ornate Italian-made accordions, but also began to import very bizarre-looking electric guitars, also from Italy.

I was beside myself with excitement the day my dad decided it was time to go downtown to the now-familiar district and check out some guitars. I raced up the narrow flight of stairs, ahead of my dad, which led to the music showroom, and found myself face-to-face with rows of shiny electric guitars. This was Mecca to me!

Dad whispered Al Tobias's name to the proprietor of the shop, after which he proceeded to hand me an abstractly shaped, sparkly white Wandre. It said "Noble" on the headstock, but

that was just the name of the importer. It was actually a Wandre designed by the eccentric Italian luthier, Antonio Pioli.

When I plugged this oddity into an amp, even with my limited experience, I realized it was a pretty lame instrument, even though I was only eleven. The strings were impossibly hard to hold down and the sound was kind of soft and wimpy. But then the owner handed me a Gibson, a higher priced brand. When I plugged this one in, the vibrant and piercing sound came shooting through the speaker. I was electrified!

We left the shop not knowing which guitar my dad would choose to put under the tree for me that Christmas, though I was hoping with all my heart that I would get the Gibson.

On Christmas morning, I was the first one to wake up, and, still in my pajamas, I spotted a red guitar case under the tree. Breathlessly, I opened it up to find, not the Sunburst Gibson of my dreams, but that modern, Danish coffee table of a guitar—the Wandre! My dad chose it not only for the sweet deal that was offered to move these beasts, but also for its warp-proof aluminum neck. Practicality like that spoke volumes to my father's generation.

When my parents finally got up, I feigned excitement and posed happily for them. I cradled the guitar in my arms. I have that Wandre to this day. I love it—not only because I cut my guitar chops on it on those blissful, halcyon days, or because it has now become a valuable collector's item, but because my dad bought it for me with his hard-earned money.

In addition, I realized that I had inherited my dad's respect for a bargain. He shared my dream at that moment, and buying me that guitar made me love him even more.

From that moment on, that ugly first guitar and I became inseparable. I still didn't have an amp, but Al Tobias, of the Hi-Hatters, came to the rescue and let me borrow his high-end Magnatone when the band wasn't gigging. The amp had a dazzling vibrato effect built right in. You'd hit a chord and the sound went, *wah wah woosh*, as it swirled around the room. It made even a simple E chord sound profound!

At that time, I had just written my first song, which I had started to play in front of the grade-school kids. It was a derivative of a Chuck Berry tune. I called it "Hully Gully Bay." The popular dances of the time were the Hully Gully and the Mashed Potato," so I decided to write a song about an imaginary place where you would go and dance and party (somewhere sunny and exotic) or maybe even a barely discovered archipelago. That extraordinary getaway was "Hully Gully Bay."

"Come with me, my babe
Where the sea is choppy
and the tide is high
Come with me, my babe
Where the seagulls rock and the riverboats fly
Yeah, Yeah—hey hey
Come with me to Hully Gully Bay
Where the sea is choppy
And the waves are rocky

And the hully gully seagulls are winging our way
Come with me, my babe
to a place called the Hully Gully Bay

When I performed this original for my seventh-grade class, I suddenly became the hit of Piper Elementary. I had experienced once again the rush of performing. I liked the way it made me feel and I couldn't wait to do it all again.

There was another guitar player at Piper whose name was Scott Sindelar. I heard that he played pretty well, and one day he invited me over to his apartment to show me his brand-new Gibson Les Paul Special, which was finished in what the Gibson catalogue called "TV Yellow." The name was penned because of the hue's resemblance to the blond finish on many television sets in the '50s and '60s. (Recently I purchased one in mint condition. I wonder if it was Scott's?) We would jack into his brand-new Ampeg Reverb-a-Rocket amplifier, and before long we could play eight songs from the catalogue of our heroes, The Ventures.

I am quite certain that I chose the Fender Jazzmaster as my next dream guitar based on the fact that this was the model Don Wilson of The Ventures played. I found one for sale in the classified ads of the *Chicago Tribune* and begged my father to take me to Chicago's exclusive northern suburb of Northbrook to try it out.

When we pulled up to the address, I noticed three brand-new Corvette Stingrays in the driveway. They belonged to the band members that had advertised the guitar. I was already impressed. For reasons unknown they were selling a near mint-condition Fender Jazzmaster finished in a vibrant three-tone sunburst: black to red to yellow. When I first gazed at it, the guitar was languishing in its blond Tolex (a DuPont registered leatherette) rectangular case with bright orange plush lining. When they saw this little eleven-year-old walk in, they started snickering amongst themselves. But when I sat down, plugged in and started playing a note-perfect "Walk, Don't Run," their expressions changed to disbelief, and they suddenly got real quiet.

"Well, you might as well try the tone that made this guitar famous," one of the band members said as he positioned the toggle switch to the center position thus engaging both pickups at the same time. He was correct. There was the bell-like ring of the famous Fender sound!

"We'll take it," I exclaimed, as my dad peeled out the 150 big ones from his well-worn brown wallet. They're probably still shaking their heads to this day.

The first time I heard the new Ventures song "The 2,000 Pound Bee," in '63, I was mesmerized by the sound of that searing lead guitar. It was like no sound I had ever heard—kind of a cross between a buzz saw and an electric guitar. It actually did replicate the sound that the title suggested—a bumblebee on steroids!

There was a revolutionary device that created that magical sound every time a guitar was patched into it; this $100 device, which was marketed by Gibson as the "Maestro Fuzz Tone," literally changed the face of the electric guitar by adding a snarling sound that could sustain a note until the crowd left the building.

After I heard Keith Richards use this sound on the Rolling Stones ’65 smash “Satisfaction,” I ran out to The Balkans music store and made one mine. Suddenly, I was a complete horn section. I could also mimic the creamy tones of Eric Clapton (then a member of Cream).

I loved guitars. I felt like Aunt Bea on *The Andy Griffith Show*. Each time Aunt Bea would buy a new hat, she would become a new woman—until it was time for another one. Each new guitar was my new hat. Every time I acquired one, whether it was new or used, mint condition or rough around the edges, I felt that surge of energy coursing through my body.

Sometimes a new guitar would set me off on a twenty-four-hour writing binge. It added spring to my step, a light in my eyes, and a dream fulfilled. “Mother, this is the last guitar I’ll ever buy, I promise, oh, please, please!” In time my collection would grow to 172 specimens, each with a unique story, and each inspirational in its own way.

Do I play them all? Yes, I do. When preparing for a session, I will scan the racks in my home for the perfect one to create the sound I hear in my head for that particular song. For screaming, raunchy sounds, perhaps I’ll grab my Charvel (the small San Dimas, California, company that Eddie Van Halen put on the map. Just listen to “Eruption” from Van Halen’s first album for a piece of sweet ear candy.).

For a funky thing, I might choose my ’56 Fender Telecaster (perhaps the Swiss army knife of guitars for me—it can do just about anything if coaxed properly). For a dreamy, Jimi Hendrix-inspired ballad, I may choose an early ’70s vintage Stratocaster, similar to the one he used.

It’s not only the sound of these vintage instruments that makes them special, it’s also the vibe they possess and the way they speak to you, and inspire you to play. When I play my ’54 Strat, I become Buddy Holly. When I strap on my original Gibson Flying V, I channel blues great Albert King. People tell me I have GAS—“guitar acquisition syndrome”! Who am I to argue?

There’s a famous Who video in which lead guitarist Pete Townshend violently smashes a vintage Telecaster into his towering amplifier—a Marshall stack. Through the years, Townshend has demolished hundreds of these irreplaceable works of art in the name of rock ‘n’ roll. Though it’s hard for me to witness or reconcile this act of destruction, I understand the desire to thrill one’s audience.

One time when I was playing with The Ides in Joplin, Missouri, I threw my own guitar high in the air (as I often did at the end of “Vehicle”). Typically, I would catch it on the last drumbeat, but this time I missed.

My beloved 1968 Les Paul Goldtop went crashing to the floor, shattering its neck. I cried as I picked up the pathetic pieces and laid them lovingly back in the case. I’ve since had it reconstructed, but I learned a hard lesson that night about respecting your axe.

Flashback to my first public performance: I signed up to appear at the Talented Teen Search at the Cermak Plaza in my hometown of Berwyn. The parking lot was crowded with teens, adults, and “golden-agers” that had come to view the spectacle. When the emcee, Leonard

Koenke (why do we remember that kind of stuff!) introduced me, I plugged my Wandre into my borrowed Magnatone amp and sang for all I was worth.

"Goin' to Kansas City, Kansas City, here I come. They got some crazy little women there, and I'm a-gonna get me one."

When I heard my eleven-year-old tenor amplified through the public address system, I basked in the vibrations that echoed across the parking lot. After I was done, and the people applauded, a cloud of happy dust circled around me, filling my every pore. While it's true that I did not even place in that competition, my course had still been set. I knew I had to experience that feeling again and again. That performance even put all of my neurotic worries into remission.

From that moment on I needed to perform every week or so just to keep my demons at bay. The spotlight and the applause was the elixir that stopped the momentum of needless anxiety.

My night terrors also subsided. In the middle of many nights I had episodes that did not feel like nightmares. They were beyond that. It felt like I was helplessly ascending through space never to land. It was terrifying and still is when I summon that feeling. Around these years I also experienced distortions of time and space, usually in the evening, when a sound as common as the ticking of a clock would suddenly be amplified, then intensified, then speed up…and up…and up. I never took acid but from what I've heard, these experiences were not too different. When music and performing finally came into my life all of this thankfully vanished.

Enter The Renegades, my debut into the rock 'n' roll sweepstakes. I was in eighth grade by that time, and determined to go up against the Beatles and the Dave Clark Five—or at least to play the Berwyn Recreation Center, make a few bucks, and (maybe) even impress the girls.

I gathered up Scott Sindelar (the enviable owner of the yellow Les Paul Special), and Eddie Skopek on drums. Eddie was the younger brother of Corrine Skopek, who was in my grade at Piper Elementary. Corrine was the one that pursued me determinedly since second grade. Of course I had no interest in her whatsoever. Our band, which I christened The Renegades (I originally wanted to call the band The Masterbeats but my dad vetoed it vehemently for reasons I didn't understand 'til years later) was pretty terrible. Eddie could barely keep a beat. We also boasted a bass player (whose name slips my mind) who did not know the importance of tuning his instrument.

I guess we were good enough, though, because we convinced my alma mater, Morton West High School, to hire us, pro bono, of course, to perform at the big Fourth of July show at the school's football stadium. This was big! We were terrified, yet exhilarated, when we hit that stage.

As I prepared for the count-off for our first number, "I've Had It," by the Crestones, I felt as if I was standing on the top floor of Chicago's Prudential Building without a parachute, screwing up the courage to jump. But jump, I did. And we rocked! "One, two, three four! Blast off!"

A schoolmate of mine named Larry Millas, unbeknownst to me, was sitting in those bleachers with soon to be bandmate Bob Bergland. Larry was a tall kid that I had known since third grade. You couldn't miss him because he wore pink-tinted glasses. Fully present that day, he was mentally taking notes. I always wondered why he wore those pink-tinted glasses throughout grade school. I figured it was some correctional thing. About a year ago, I finally asked, "Larry, what was up with those pink glasses?"

He said, "I just thought they looked cool."

Larry was way ahead of the curve with those specs. But, specs or no specs, he was always kind of a cool guy, and in eighth grade, during that performance with The Renegades, he was the one scanning the stage, like a nighthawk, for signs of life. He must have been thinking, *That band is terrible, but that guitar guy plays and sings really well*. Bob added, "Yeah, and he knows all the chords!"

About a week after that event, I heard a knock on the door. It was Larry Millas clutching a guitar case. I recognized him from grade school, but I didn't let him in at the time. He talked to me as he stood outside on the front porch.

"I've got a band and, umm, I think you'd be great in this band," he murmured.

"I've already got a band. Thanks, though. What's the band's name?" I asked.

"The Shy-Lads," he replied. Huge negative.

A week later, I heard that persistent *knock, knock, knock,* and found Larry Millas, again, at the door. This guy just wouldn't take no for an answer!

"I've got this band. We're called the Shy-Lads."

"I know, I know! That's a terrible name," I replied bluntly.

"Yeah, our drummer's dad came up with it. But, really," he said, "come over to Bob Erhart's house. He plays drums and Bob Bergland plays bass."

I already knew Bob Bergland. We had been in the same Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts troop. Our fathers were friends and we were both from close-knit, supportive families. In fact, Larry told me that Bob's mom had recently cashed in her S & H Green Stamps (these were stamps you would receive for purchasing merchandise at various stores that you would paste into booklets and redeem for other merchandise) to buy her son a shiny, new, copper-finished six-string Danelectro bass. The "Dano" was an American brand distinctive for its use of Formica and composite board instead of wood for its body. The magnetic pickups were cased in what appeared to be lipstick cases. I found out later they actually were lipstick cases!

So, finally, I gave in to Larry's persistence and agreed to come and play. A few days later I walked the four long blocks to current drummer Bob Erhart's home, lugging my Wandre guitar and Al Tobias's fifty-pound plus Magnatone amplifier. I would have to stop about every fourth bungalow to rest and shift hands.

In Erhart's tiny attic space, the boys were working on the song "Tell Me Why," a brand-new one from the Beatles (that places the date exactly in time: the summer of '64). Fortunately, I knew this tune very well and joined right in.

I started strumming the chords on the guitar, mimicking John Lennon's rhythm part (even then, Lennon was my favorite), while Larry sang the lead vocal. I noticed right away that when I sang harmony, the other guys did not switch to my part. That impressed me to no end!

The hallmark of a lousy band is when one of the singers is swayed to move up or down to another band member's part. These guys stayed on their own parts! Actually, this was the main thing that convinced me to leave The Renegades behind and join The Shy-Lads. (I didn't want to rock the boat that first day, but something had to be done about both the name and drummer Bob Erhart's clunky-looking 1940's natural-wood drum kit—actually I now realize it was pretty cool!) Plus, Larry had a very good voice. Still, there was work to be done. I knew I had to give these guys a crash course in vocal phrasing.

Now, every Beatles fan knows that the verse in "Tell Me Why" goes, "Well, I gave you everything I had, but you left me standing all alone…"

"No offense, Lar, but your phrasing is all wrong," I said, hoping that I wasn't launching an attack. "The phrase 'I gave you everything I had' is sung bunched up quickly like this [I demonstrated], not sung slowly. Same thing with the words 'but you left me standing on my own,'" I added. "The rest of the line follows from there."

Larry looked at me. I guessed that he was not used to being challenged in this way, and then, after what seemed like an interminable, deadly silence, he replied, "Let me try it that way."

Whew, now I knew I had to be in this band! How could I have known that this day would give way to a fifty-year journey that sees no chance of stopping? From this attic rehearsal, my career would be catapulted into motion.

The next day, I told the members of The Renegades that it was over—I was disbanding the group and joining The Shy-Lads. Though I braced myself for a meltdown, there were no tears. The anticlimactic sendoff made me realize just how uncommitted these guys were to making it big. Obviously, our time together had just been a lark to them!

The next time I got together with Larry and the guys, I sheepishly ventured, "We really should find a new name. The Shy-Lads is really bad. How about The Shondels?"

I had been keeping this name in my back pocket for a while now. I had first seen it in the back pages of a *Melody Maker* newspaper (I treasured these publications because they represented the whole allure of the British rock culture), which Alice Anne had brought back to me after visiting England and Scotland with her Scottish fiancé and future husband, Jim McCabe.

My culture-crazed sister had also carried back these other amazing recordings: The Shadows' *Greatest Hits*, smashes by Freddie and the Dreamers (this was before their dance, "the Freddie," became popular; it resembled a Kingfisher penguin flapping its appendages mindlessly against its thighs), and the debut LP by a new English group called The Rolling Stones! "England's newest hit makers!"

But it was the adverts, in the back of that newspaper, that intrigued me most. It was like being in the London Underground gazing at emerging bands with strange and fascinating names: The Steampacket, The Underbeats, Shane Fenton and the Fentones, and The Graham Bond

Organisation (note British spelling!). They were performing in clubs such as the Cavern, the Marquee, and the Rainbow. It was in these back pages I noticed a performance by an obscure group called The Shondels.

They were a small-time British band playing tiny clubs in London. I figured (correctly) that they'd never make it, and history proved me right. But, I also liked the name because it was the last name of one of my favorite artists, Troy Shondel. His hit "This Time" was currently in high rotation on my turntable.

Larry, in his unvarnished honesty asked, "What's a Shondel?"

I told him that I had absolutely no idea, but added, "It sounds cool, doesn't it?"

"Yeah," Larry said. "It sounds cool!" Everyone else agreed. That day we officially became The Shondels.

That agreement marked the beginning of forever. We rehearsed tirelessly and went from teen club to teen club, from church event to recreation center, offering our services. The routine was exhausting, but it paid off. We soon begged our parents to buy us matching Sears Roebuck Silvertone amps. These were "piggyback" models where the amplifier section was separate from the speaker cabinet and perched on top. It made for easier cartage and more flexibility.

We made our grand debut.

When we hit the Berwyn Recreation Center (known as "The Rec"), we gave our hard sell to the director, Fritz Ploegman.

"Well boys, I'd like to have you play our Saturday night dance, but of course, you'd have to 'donate your services.'" That's not the last time we would hear that phrase from countless teen center managers and club owners.

These performances went really well. I remember the kids dancing, frugging, ponying, and twisting to our repertoire, which included hits by the Beatles and The Ventures. We also covered "Bad Motorcycle" and "I've Had It" by the Crestones.

Then there was our selection of Beach Boys songs, which offered us a good excuse to show off our emerging harmonies. We did "Fun, Fun, Fun," "409," and "Surfin' Safari." Then we'd cut loose with "Carhop," by the Exports, "Land of 1,000 Dances," by Cannibal and the Headhunters, and even a cover of the Chiffons' hit "He's So Fine" (changed to "She's So Fine" We loved singing that "doo lang, doo lang, doo lang" hook in three-part harmony!).

We even started sneaking some of our originals into the set: The Ventures-inspired "Corruption" and "Torque Out" ("I'll get the car, you buy the gas, I'll bring the girls…Torque Out!").

After starting out with a wicked snare drum rim shot, I intoned the first song's ominous hook, "Corruption." Then Bob Bergland took over with the "Peter Gunn" inspired bass line. I continued our Ventures homage by adding the twangy lead on my sunburst Jazzmaster.

Time flew by. I became a freshman, and the other guys became sophomores. After being Boy of the Year in eighth grade I was now demoted to nerd boy of the year—at the bottom of the food chain at Morton West High School. When I couldn't find my algebra class on the very first day of school, I slid into the class on my ass, ten minutes late. I had my slick new leather-soled

shoes and the floors had just been waxed. “Nice entrance, Mr. Peterik,” intoned the old Mrs. Buddeke. “Now find your way down to the dean’s office for a detention!”

That same day as I stood saying my name in the gym class lineup, Coach Regan silently came over to me and handed me a pink slip of paper. “Should be in girls PE. Take it down to the dean’s office for a detention!” he bellowed. My hair was only slightly longer than the guys around me, but too long for the coach. I was batting two for two on my first day of high school.

Fortunately The Shondels started playing the sock hops after the basketball games at Morton West. In fact, we proudly became the official sock hop band. It was called a “sock hop” because the kids were asked to remove their shoes so they wouldn’t scuff up the gymnasium floor.

The performing was great, but, gradually, tensions were brewing during rehearsal. Bob Erhart’s father was becoming a major pain in the ass. There were never enough drums in the mix for Mr. Erhart and his beloved son.

“You’re drowning him out with bass and guitars!” he bitterly complained.

After every set, right on cue, he would chide, “Too much bass! Too much bass! I can’t hear the vocals, can’t hear the drums!"

Our resident Achilles heel would go on and on, night after night. He went from being an irritating paper cut to becoming an oozing incision. But beyond that, we started to notice something else—Bob Erhart was not really getting the new beat of the modern day songs. To him, the bass drum was four on the floor, *boom, boom, boom, boom*.

Mr. Erhart’s coddled son just didn’t get the whole *boom – boom boom* thing, at all. After putting all the negatives together, Bob Bergland, Larry Millas, and I converged at Larry’s house one afternoon to scan the phone book for the number of a drummer in Mr. Boker’s grade school band, of which we were all a part (I played sax, Larry played percussion, and Bob played clarinet). This Mike Borch guy, whom we had all noticed, was really on the ball and knew how to smack that snare drum in band practice.

We scanned the pages, “Borchard,” “Borchart,” “Borch!” We struck gold. He answered right away. After we convinced him to audition, we gave him the directions to what Larry called his “big ritzy house.” It was a magnificent place built in the early ’50s on a double-wide lot. It was located on the upscale Riverside Drive in Berwyn. We even put up a sign in front boasting, “Big Ritzy House” so Mike couldn’t miss it!

When the day came, Mike’s audition song was “Game of Love” by Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders. We had recently tried out this song with Bob Erhart, and it had been a total disaster. But on this day, I counted it off and Mike proceeded to play it exactly like the record. *Boom, crack, boom-boom.* Heaven! Smiles were exchanged around the room and we welcomed Mike Borch into The Shondels.

The Shondels and I used to frequent Chicago’s music row, taking the ‘L’, train downtown from Cicero, and then getting off at Wabash. We would bug all the music store proprietors by asking questions, and then we would beg permission to plug their guitars into amplifiers. These outings also allowed us to observe the burgeoning Chicago music scene as other real musicians

plugged in and jammed in the music rooms of Lyon & Healy Music, The Guitar Gallery, or Kagan & Gaines.

We rehearsed every chance we got. We bought sharp, matching red sweaters for our upcoming shows. We rehearsed in Larry's basement. At breaks, we'd shoot pool on Larry's dad's professional table. Dr. Millas was the beloved town physician. He was known for bartering loaves of bread and bushels of tomatoes and unsold shirts for delivering a baby or setting an arm if the family didn't have the means. Everyone in Berwyn and Cicero knew and loved the kindly Dr. Millas.

Early on, we played a variety show at Piper Elementary, our alma mater. We were the only musical act among dancers, comics, and jugglers. We wowed the audience in those red cardigans.

Flush with victory, we walked back to Larry's house a few blocks away. Unfortunately, we got so distracted goofing off and playing pool that we forgot to go back and take the final curtain call with all of the other acts. We learned a lot about becoming professionals that day, and about avoiding fancy distractions—like shooting pool.

Fortunately, we exercised a little more discipline the next time around. On our first professional gig we opened for a fashion show at Morton East High School. Again, we all wore our signature red sweaters and collectively sweated under the spotlights as the houselights dimmed. Soon, the spot zeroed in on me. I sang:

"When I was just a little boy / I asked my mother, 'what shall I be?

'Will I be handsome, will I be rich?' Here's what she said to me"

My folksy rendition of "Que Sera, Sera" was then rudely interrupted by the sharp crack of the snare drum.

"You ain't nothing but a hound dog!

Crockin' all the time!"

I sang it "crockin'" because that's what it sounded like when Elvis sang the song. Years later I found out he was saying "cryin.'"

The audience roared their approval! That was a defining moment for me. I heard my voice echo through the wonderful acoustics of the Chodl Auditorium. The Shondels were bringing down the house! We were on our way.

Emboldened by the crowd response and our raging teenage hormones, we entered the Talented Teen Search, being held the very next day at the Cermak Plaza. This was the contest I cut my teeth on the year before with my solo rendition of Wilbert Harris's gem, "Kansas City."

We performed the Pyramids' hit "Penetration" (with a few years under my belt, I wondered if that title went a lot deeper than just a reference to the piercing sound of the lead guitar). Unfortunately, we failed to penetrate. We came in at fifth place.

That first year represented our coming of age as a band. Our door-to-door peddling of our musical wares was paying off. We were playing almost every weekend at venues like Berwyn's Red Feather Building, Morton West High School, and Tiger Hall in Lyons. The latter was a wild

place where a senior named Val Godlewski would get raunchy and dirty dance with basketball star Skip Hack as we did our ten minute rave-up rendition of Ray Charles's "What'd I Say."

The greasers from high school came dressed in their "workies" (short, gray work pants rolled up on the bottom), and at about 11 p.m., they decided that they were sweaty and horny enough to tie red bandanas around their heads. They proceeded to bump and grind to our version of "Land of 1,000 Dances." (Our first swirl-finished, green business card read: "The Shondels—Band of 1,000 Dances.")

The big moment came when a club that hadn't even opened yet contacted us. It was to be called The Keynote Club in suburban Lyons, Illinois. Since Lyons was known for its strip clubs and houses of ill repute, the community felt that the addition of a teen club would serve as a breath of fresh air. This venue would lend an air of respectability to a then-sordid outpost.

Plus, the club owner offered us five-hundred big ones for a two-day run. This was *huge* money to us. At our first show, just a few weeks earlier, we had only received $25; not apiece, but for the entire band!!

For this show we decided we had to retire the red sweaters. The Shondels rode the 'L' downtown to go to the fabled Smokey Joe's for some groovy threads. "The man who knows goes to Smokey Joe's" was their radio-blasted slogan. We listened to the train announcer through the megaphone-like sound system:"Jackson," "Monroe," and finally "Wabash," where we tumbled out into the stifling humidity of Chicago summer to look for Smokey Joe's.

Suddenly there it was in all its glory on South State Street. The store window burst with color: coats, shirts, and slacks of every shade—from shocking lime green to deep purple. We were by far the youngest and palest people in the store. After we bought our Beatles look-alike sport coats (tan corduroy with velvet lapels) we walked over to Tad's $1.19 Steakhouse a few blocks north also on State Street. For just over a buck you got the juiciest, toughest, grizzliest steak known to man. There was literally a bonfire of flames as the grill master herded these babies from the bin to the grill and onto your baked-potato laden plate. There was no medium-rare or even well-done—they were all incinerated equally. I can still taste the bitter charcoal laden with salt against the sizzling fat. Now that's eatin'!

Back in Lyons, Illinois, packed on opening night, our newly outfitted bodies and The Keynote Club generated quite a buzz. "The Shondels rock, man!" We had gone beyond the days of playing wimpy songs like "Mrs. Brown, You've Got a Lovely Daughter," which Bob Bergland sang as Larry performed the palm-muted guitar part with a wadded up Kleenex underneath the strings! Now we were jammin' The Rolling Stones ("The Last Time" and"Satisfaction"), and harmonizing the complex vocal arrangements of The Mamas and the Papas with "Monday, Monday," and the West Coast's Beau Brummels and The Byrds.

Sometimes, when we would come off a string of dates, sick as dogs with the flu, we'd line up as good old Doc Millas gave us each an injection of gamma globulin, apparently the very essence of life. I swear I saw microorganisms swimming around in that syringe! Presto, chango, instant health. We were tapping our toes, ready for the next gig! We called it "The Doc Millas Magic Bullet!" I found out each of these shots contained about $150 of this life-restoring elixir.

With our hot new band playing the sock hops after the basketball games, gradually the cheerleaders began chatting us up. We were invited to sit on “the stage” of the Morton West cafeteria at lunch where all the school's glitterati (the jocks and pom-pom girls and cheerleaders) ate their sloppy joes and drank their chocolate milk.

The Shondels were my E-Ticket to hipness and acceptability. A nerd no more, I even traded in my broken, black, horn-rimmed glasses for a sharp pair of yellow-tinted, aviator frames. I was in with the in-crowd and I swore I’d never be outside looking in again.