

## **Adventures in McCloudland**

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Chapter 44

1998

As I listened to Chopin fill our lobby, I could hardly believe our good fortune. The piano had been freshly tuned, the top opened, the front removed, and the beautiful melody moved about the room, meandered into the overstuffed sofas and settled in my very soul. It had all been worth the struggle, the money, everything. It doesn't get any better than our own private concert. As I sat on the stairs in the lobby watching our guests enjoy their special evening I could barely hold back the tears. I wonder if other people feel the same way about music as I do.

When I was ten years old, and my mother worked full time, it was my job to clean our house on Saturday. It was always a frantic rush as 5 o'clock approached and Mother was due home. I'd barely finish. The total day's work was just dusting and vacuuming the living room, but the job would take all day as I was always distracted by music.

We had this record player in the living room with a large mirror over it. The counsel had a lift top that played 78's and a cabinet below with dozens of record albums. There were all the musicals on Broadway like Oklahoma, Carousel, Porgy & Bess, and Showboat. There was Mario Lanza, Nat "King" Cole, Frank Sinatra and many more. I'd put on a stack of records and lip sync to each one of them. Even now I can hear the refrains and know all the words to I'm Just a Girl Who Can't Say No ...Dance Ballerina, Dance... I can still hum along with Chopin's melodious refrains, and find the melody in Bach's pieces.

What can I say. I was 10, no brothers or sisters, a mom who worked when no one else's did, and I had this great imagination. I imagined I was the singer of every song. If it was an orchestral number, I was the conductor. Sometimes I played the lead instrument. The fact that I had tried playing the cello for a brief time without success did not daunt my enthusiasm. I was a great musician.

Often, when the construction project was thoroughly stuck, Lee and I would drive up on Lawndale and park the van. We'd look down at this dark forlorn hotel and imagine it bright with lights and filled with people. And always the day dream would include music. People would be enjoying wonderful music. It was a dream that often kept us going. Sometimes it seemed impossible. We were sure it would never happen. Then we'd get another phone call about the loan getting closer, and we were sure we could make it happen.

So anytime a guest sits at the piano and tentatively begins playing, we instantly turn off the CD and wait. And if the playing is truly good, I relish it.

Such was the case when one of our guests, who'd been here several times, sat at the piano and played a little. He said he and his wife, Janet, were teachers. He'd play a little when he visited. They were such nice people, we loved having them return. On Thanksgiving morning 1999 he asked if we'd like him to give a "little concert" that evening for our guests. "Of course, we'd love it."

We put a notice on the desk. "Don Ericson will be playing the piano in our lobby tonight at 8. Please join us."

The next two guests were astounded. "Don Ericson?" "From Redding?" "The Pianist?" "Here?" "Tonight?" "Really?"

"I guess it's the same Don Ericson. He's a guest who plays the piano and he's from Redding."

Well, our guest who liked to play the piano mesmerized all of us for two hours. We filled the lobby with candles and passed the port wine while he filled the lobby with great music...everything from Chopin to Mozart to Vivaldi to show tunes to some wonderful improvisations (when none of us would let him leave).

It was the beginning of something wonderful.

A few weeks later we hosted a special weekend for their best students and had concerts on the piano, electronic piano, harp, cello and flute for two days and nights. The children were charming and the music wonderful. Don told us that several of the older young men, along with Jonathan Narducci, would be interested in playing on Sunday nights on a regular basis.

A month later, Jonathan Narducci, back in Redding from studying in New York and a Carnegie Hall appearance, held our guests speechless while he made our humble piano sound like a stately, shiny, perfectly tuned grand instrument.

Sometimes really good things happen.

Later we found out that Don had been raised in McCloud. Some of his extended family visited us and shared wonderful stories.

Don and Janet visited often and have provided us with special memories. The passing of Janet and Don's subsequent visits alone were intensely sad. But we were glad we had apparently created some special memories for them.

Since then Don has become a family member. After taking a year off for some necessary surgery, Don returned last Thanksgiving eve for a concert. Thanksgiving doesn't get much better than the satisfaction of a good turkey dinner, a comfy sofa, and great music; live, by a friend. I believe people rarely get an opportunity to hear good music in an intimate setting and we're so very delighted to be able to offer it. We're looking forward to his final Christmas Eve Concert for us as he will spend the holiday here before we move on. That is if Alice can find her way out of here, for his final Christmas Eve concert to having him here for his final Christmas Eve concert.