

Only A Memory Away - The Dave and Vi Stogner Story

(A history of his music and their romance)

CHAPTER ONE

Madera, California

July 2000

The early morning sunshine reflected off the wind chimes casting an array of color onto the counter top. Viola Stogner stood at her kitchen window and, seeing the colorful display, thought about how she herself had been reflecting on the experiences in her life. Dave, of course, was always foremost in her memories. It had been over ten years since he had passed away, but she had held on lovingly to his memory and remained faithful to a promise she had made him. She had recently made a decision about carrying out one of his unaccomplished desires, or dreams as Dave would have said. This was a way to help keep her promise, only she was going to take it a step further. This is what had her feeling nostalgic as well as anxious this morning.

Dave had always wanted a book written about his music career. This was an important way, he felt, to preserve the Western Swing music he had spent most of his life creating and perfecting. When he and Vi lived in Corralitos he started recording on cassette tapes stories about himself and some of the entertainers he had worked with over the years. When they met Judy Malmin, a near-by neighbor, they learned that she had done some writing and oral histories.

Dave explained to her what he had in mind and she agreed to work with him writing his book. Judy wrote just what he wanted, and reading it was like hearing him telling his story. He wanted it to be clear-cut and simple to understand like lyrics from his songs. He also wanted it to be only about his music career, with little of his personal life. Unfortunately, he passed away before the work could be finished.

Vi had never lost sight of the desire Dave had to keep his style of music alive. She continued to keep in touch with some of the people he had been close to in the music business, many were dear friends. She kept his name going by providing information for articles and newsletters. She still did whatever she could to promote his Western Swing music recordings. She also never gave up the idea of having his music biography published someday.

It had been years since Judy had asked her how Dave's story could be continued and enhanced. Vi had known anything she contributed would be of a personal nature, and understanding Dave didn't want that she just let it go. She had always

had a great deal she could say to add to his story, however, the question was always, should she? What would he think if she told her story? What would her family think? There were few people who knew what Vi knew. When Dave said no personal life in his music career story, he felt it necessary to keep that information private. He had his reasons for this and she knew very well what those reasons were.

When Vi began thinking more and more about continuing Dave's story, she decided to talk with Judy. She telephoned her one afternoon and began sharing information with her. This was the part of Dave's past that Judy had never been told, and now she understood why Dave never wanted to talk about his personal life. Her response was that she definitely felt Vi needed to include her story with Dave's and that she would help her if she wanted to continue the book project.

After that, Vi did some serious drawn out debating and soul searching. It was mostly because of her neighbor, Marie Brown, that she was able to make her decision as to what to do next.

Marie had been the person Vi confided in about wanting to share with her family what she had held inside for so long. Marie herself had experienced hidden secrets that had greatly impacted her life, so she was very encouraging about being open and honest. Marie was several years younger than Vi, but their ages held no importance. Their spirits had bonded when they became friends. Marie could see Vi's kitchen window from her house where she lived with her son, Dustin. In the mornings, when the shade in Vi's window went up that was a signal that coffee was ready. It was where she could get a jump-start to her day by visiting with Vi, sipping coffee with her, and often sharing stories about themselves.

Sometimes, Vi would recall times like when she played with one of her brothers' little friends, and he'd eat her mud pies. Or, how she'd go around her house singing *I Want To Be A Cowboy's Sweetheart* after she heard Patsy Montana singing on the radio. Marie could remember as a young girl the boys calling her "spaghetti legs", and how she'd kiss "Kookie" Burns goodnight at the side of the TV when *77 Sunset Strip* was on and she had to go to bed. She knew she wanted to marry "Kookie." She and Vi would laugh together and enjoy themselves.

Vi's stories began before Marie was born. Marie could relate easily, though, because they each had traits that were similar. They were both very determined women. They were industrious and resourceful, and had been that way since they were little girls. Marie had spent most of her life in Fresno. Of Italian heritage, she was tall, beautiful, had brown eyes and long, reddish dark hair. Vi had moved there from Drumright, Oklahoma when she was fourteen years old. She was very blonde, petite, literally five-foot-two eyes of blue, and she, too, was a beautiful woman.

As Vi glanced out of the window, she saw Marie backing out of her driveway. She couldn't help thinking that at last the time was here. The two of them were leaving the heat of the San Joaquin Valley and were driving to the coast. It was

house-sitting time. For the past three years, Vi, her granddaughter, Bethany, and Marie had spent time together staying at a beach house in Capitola for a friend of Vi's family. This year for Vi relaxation was not the primary goal. She had decided this would be the time to tell her granddaughter the secret that she had held in her heart since she was Bethany's age.

Bethany was a gorgeous young woman, with a smile that would take away any man's breath. Vi and Dave had always adored her. She was twenty-three now and had just been married in September. She and her husband, Jeff, had made plans to go to the mountains, so she wouldn't be spending as much time at the beach house this year. It was important to Vi for her to be there for a while, though. In the past few months since the wedding, Vi had felt that now her granddaughter would understand and could help Vi tell her two sons and two stepsons what she had decided they should know. After that, perhaps she could add to Dave's story and finish his book.

Heading towards the coast, Vi would always see landmarks that would remind her of Dave and she'd relate experiences they'd had together. On Highway 152 off of Highway 99, there are two palm trees side by side. The one with ivy looks like a man and a woman swaying in the wind. She and Dave had always commented about that tree when they passed by it. It had become a site for Vi to drift off describing some stored away memory. Marie thought conversations with her were wonderful.

Marie was a dreamer and romantic person at heart. She was always intrigued by the stories Vi could tell. She had never met Dave. He had died before she met Vi. She had heard so much said about him, though, and she wanted to hear more. It fascinated her that two people could find such love and romance like they had found. She had been divorced for some time. She had begun to think that she could someday find the kind of love that Vi had experienced. Vi had given her hope that she had never envisioned for herself.

It wouldn't be long, Vi thought as they neared the Capitola beach house. She had always made this a special time to be with her grandchildren who lived nearby. She remembered last year when Bethany's brothers, Lucas and Jacob, had found an ice cream flavor named "Orange Blossom Special" and had brought it to her. When her surfer grandsons came to visit, they always seemed to be hungry! Food was always high on their agenda. Both Vi and Marie loved to cook, so that was fine with them. The kids loved Vi's cooking just as Dave had.

Marie had been very impressed by the heirlooms Vi had recently given her family and friends. Vi had made little cookbooks, *Nana's Recipes for Life*, as Christmas gifts. They were some of Dave's favorite recipes. She had given her two sons family bibles in which she had written their genealogy. She also had Dave's Western Swing music transferred to CDs. This was another way she felt she could pass on Dave's music to their grandchildren. Passing on a legacy was proving to be a significant part of Vi's purpose, and the love she and Dave had shared was a meaningful part of that legacy.