

# Only A Memory Away - The Dave and Vi Stogner Story

## *(A history of his music and their romance)*

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### CHAPTER EIGHT

#### Coarsegold and Santa Cruz, California

1974-1979

Marie went to the kitchen to prepare dinner while Bethany and Vi talked about what had been revealed. Bethany had a few questions, but most everything was clear to her. Having read her grandfather's story, she had become curious to know about Vi's part in his life. She asked her grandmother to tell about other experiences that they had after they were married. It was a warm evening, so they had dinner outside on the deck. Afterwards they sat in the deck chairs, and as Vi relaxed she drifted back in time again.

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One evening Dave was talking on the phone. I saw that he was stretching the phone cord and looking out the front window. I heard him say, "I've got to go! There is a big bear on my front porch!" The way he behaved, I believed him! When I looked, I was startled to see what seemed to me to be a huge bear going through a garbage can that we had out there. It was knocking over flower planters and tearing things up. We were scared to death.

Dave called the sheriff's office and then he called our next door neighbors to tell them about the bear. They didn't believe him! They knew Dave's humor by then so they just said, "Oh sure, Dave!"

The bear left our porch, then moseyed up to another neighbor's house. Those neighbors weren't home. The bear went under their porch and settled itself in. When the sheriff's deputies responded to the call, they told us the bear had escaped from Safari World, which was located near us on Highway 41. It took some time for them to get the bear into a truck so they could take it back to the park. They coaxed it in with food.

According to them, the bear was pretty harmless and was just looking for food. Well, that isn't all it was doing. It had left its "calling card" right there on our front porch. Dave was furious. A sheriff's deputy came in and sat with us for a bit, until we calmed down. Dave demanded a twenty-four hour watch on the bear!

The next morning, on the front page of the *Madera Times* the headline read, "Bear

Does Its Thing On Dave Stogner's House!" Dave was the talk of the town and our friends rubbed it in for a while. One of them brought up a Magnum handgun for Dave, in case the bear came back!

The animal keepers told us the bear's name was Black Bart, and that all he wanted was some peanuts. They said if Dave would have let him, the bear would have wanted to sit in his lap.

Dave didn't see any humor in that. He told them, "It would have played hell sittin' on my lap!" It was hilarious later, but not that night!

Dave took me with him just about everywhere he performed. I had also become friends with many of the people he associated with in the music business. Of course, I had known all The Western Rhythmairs from the earlier days. Dave, being the way he was, always made new friends along the way. It was just his nature. It didn't matter where we lived, we had family and friends all around us.

Dan would bring his little boys, Cory and David, to visit with us. One day, Cory wrote a little song about Chant-e. Dave sure liked that. He took Cory along with him to the Coarsegold Inn one time when he was performing there. He introduced him as an up-and-coming Country Western music star. He told the audience that he thought they would hear a lot more about Cory in the future. Cory went up on stage and unexpectedly sang *God Bless America*. Everyone applauded him. That sure surprised Dave!

Now, David was different. He loved Country Western music, but he wasn't about to get up and sing! One time, his parents took him to a Willie Nelson concert at Hughes Stadium in Sacramento. Afterwards he wanted to go backstage. When his mom and dad told him he couldn't, he said, "Well, tell them who we are! My grandfather is Dave Stogner!" He believed that would open all doors!

In 1975, the Second Annual Country Music Awards in Bakersfield honored Bonnie Owens. Dave was invited, of course, so we drove to Bakersfield for the show. He had known Bonnie since the 1950s and the "Cousin Herb" days. She was in the same category as Bill Woods for always being ready to help other musicians. Dave felt she deserved every bit of the honor for the years she worked on behalf of Country music. He felt the award couldn't have been given to a nicer person.

Bonnie was married to Merle Haggard at that time. During the show, he was seated next to her on the stage. Dave considered Merle to be a good friend and he was proud to know him. He always said it was a wonderful feeling for him to know some one like Merle. Merle has always been a big credit to the Country Western music business, and he was Dave's favorite entertainer.

Dave had been asked to perform with the band for the awards show. When he was playing his fiddle, the pickup flew off. After the show, Merle commented about Dave needing a new fiddle. He told Dave to come by his office the next day. He did, and Merle gave him an electric Fender fiddle. That meant a lot to Dave and he

used that fiddle for some of his shows.

One night in Merced while Dave went to get his coat after a performance, some guy put Dave's fiddle under his arm and started walking out with it. Fortunately, the owner of the place saw this, went after the guy, and brought back the fiddle. Having come from Merle, that fiddle meant too much to him to take a chance on losing it. He stopped using it in public after that.

In August that year, we went to Lake Tahoe to see Merle in concert. We hadn't made hotel reservations. When we arrived, there wasn't a vacancy to be found. Dave called Harrah's, where Merle was performing, and talked to one of his managers. I think it was Lewis Talley, who was one of Dave's good friends. He told us to wait where we were and he'd see what he could do. He called back shortly and told us where there would be a room waiting.

We took our time doing some gambling, and then went to the concert. Later when we got to the place where the room was, the man at the desk said, "I hope you're Dave Stogner. I've been waiting up for you to come get this key!"

When we walked into the room, we were more than surprised. It had a circular bed. I had never slept in one like that before, or since! It had a sitting room with a marble bar. There was a television at the foot of the bed on a fur-covered stand. The curtains were fur and the bedspread was fur. We wished we had brought a camera. Then, we wished we had a bottle of wine. It was a fine place to be! We were treated like royalty on that trip and we didn't want to leave.

In October, Dave released another record with his Sierra Recordings label. This one was titled *If You Can't Get Five, Take Two*, written by Andy Razoff. The flip side was titled *My Galveston Gal*, which Phil Harris wrote. It was released through Angie Woods' DJ Recording Service. Angie is Bill Woods' wife. Bill wrote a promotion article for this record. It was about Dave bringing back some of the good ol' country swing from the 1940's. It said it was a new, simple sound without all the fancy production gimmicks, voices, strings, fuzz tones and so on.

Dave took me to Hollywood when he cut the masters. We were at the Capitol Records building on the corner of Hollywood and Vine. After we were finished there, we went to meet his friends, Jimmy and Inez Wakely. When we drove up to their gated driveway, Dave announced us into the intercom. Two large gates with music notes on them swung open and we drove through. I was very impressed. We visited with them for a while. They were very nice. Dave and Jimmy talked about what they each were currently doing. They shared some stories about some of the musicians they knew, and what they were doing.

Jimmy walked us to the car when we were ready to leave. Dave showed him the western shirts I had just made. I didn't want him to. I was proud of those shirts, though, and Dave sure seemed to be, as well. I had been making his casual shirts since we lived in Barstow. When we moved to Coarsegold, I started making his stage shirts and then his pants, too. He told me he loved them. Jimmy told me to

be proud of helping Dave. He said Inez helped him all the time.

Dave liked to visit the radio stations to check on the play his record was getting. His friend Elwin Cross was a DJ for KEAP radio in Fresno. They had known each other since the 1950s. Elwin was a DJ for years. He was also on KYNO radio. Dave always liked stopping by to talk to him. He'd tell Dave his record was getting good play. That record did well and was a big help to Dave. He said it kept his name where he wanted it to be, out in front of the public.

Dave had met Cubbie Slayton when we moved to Coarsegold. Cubbie was a musician, too, and he became a good friend to both of us. He played lead guitar and did vocals. He had performed and done shows, including Cousin Herb's Trading Post Show in Bakersfield. He joined Dave for some gigs locally, and around the San Joaquin Valley. He also worked in Dave's Sierra Awnings business.

Cubbie's son, Rick, was only seventeen when he started playing drums for Dave. Dave told Cubbie more than once that he'd rather have Rick as a drummer than anyone he knew. Rick performed with Dave for quite a while. They both played in the band for *The California Country Music Show* that Dave did. This was a series of radio shows that were prerecorded in 1976. For this series, Dave would have guest performers sit in with his band.

Once again he put a lot of humor into the shows. He'd joke around with the musicians and make little casual remarks, "We are near Bass Lake where the fishin' is good, when the water's there!" "He's campaigning this election year. He's running for the State line." He saw humor in places and events that others never noticed.

The last time I heard from Cubbie, he reminded me of some of Dave's humor. He said, "Dave was always making jokes during the shows. It might be a story, or just a comment. He'd say funny things that today are old hat, but at that time they were brand-new. He'd close the shows with lines like,

'Y'all don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!'

'Y'all drive careful when you leave cause the life you save might be mine!'

'If you're drivin', make sure you have a car!'

'On your way home, don't park! Because accidents cause people!'"

Cubbie also recalled, "Dave was always talking about his mean ol' woman and how she did things to him, or didn't! Of course, everyone knew he was joking for sure then. He loved to make people happy and watch them enjoying themselves. If something happened humorous, silly, or embarrassing to himself or someone else, he'd always make a joke about it so as to take the bad moment away."

He probably had as good a time as anybody did while he was performing. I know it was always fun for his audiences and him when he sang the song he co-wrote called Tulsa Baby:

*I went to see my gal last night/ She's my Tulsa baby/Asked her if she'd be my wife/She said someday maybe/Tulsa baby that corn bread gal of mine/Tulsa baby someday she'll be mine/I stopped off at Joe's café with my Tulsa baby/She insisted that we eat corn bread and chicken gravy/Tulsa Baby that corn bread gal of mine/Tulsa baby someday she'll be mine/If you see a blue-eyed gal that says her name is Katie/If she weighs two hundred pounds/That's my Tulsa baby/Tulsa baby that corn bread gal of mine/Tulsa Baby someday she'll be mine/Someday we'll settle down and I don't mean maybe/We'll eat three times a day corn bread and chicken gravy....*

Dave also prerecorded a series of shows that were for KAIL Channel 53, located in Clovis. Cubbie was with him, and some of *The Rhythmaires* joined him for that series. They recorded thirteen thirty-minute programs to be shown over the next two years called *The Dave Stogner Show*. They performed in front of a live audience. I helped Dave write out the song list for each show. We couldn't get Channel 53 in the mountains, though, so we didn't watch them when they were shown. A friend of ours taped them for us to watch later.

By 1978, we had decided we would like to buy a larger piece of property in Coarsegold. We sold our place and bought a new double-wide mobile home to put on the new property. We moved, but we didn't have it in our minds to settle there. We built a beautiful redwood deck and did the landscaping. We were going to sell the place the following year for a profit. We didn't make it that far, though. On June 15, 1979, Dave had a heart attack caused by congestive heart failure.

He had worked that day with Cubbie building a deck on a mobile home. I had gone to Harry's house in Fresno. Dave was going to join me after work. We had made plans with friends in Aptos to house-sit their place for three months while they vacationed. We had rented out our place, and the renters were keeping the dogs for us. We were going to leave for Aptos the next morning.

Dave arrived that evening and went in to take a shower. When he came out, he lay on the couch until he started coughing. When he got up we walked outside. There was a wild fire near where he had been working that day, so I thought the smoky air had gotten to him. He wasn't getting any better, so I called to Harry. When Harry saw him, he said we were going to the hospital.

Three blocks away was Valley Children's Hospital. We drove him there. They didn't want to take him, but by then he was in bad shape. They started examining him at the front entrance. They found that his blood pressure was extremely high. They called a heart specialist named Dr. William Owens. He came in and they continued to work on Dave right there in the lobby. His condition was so bad that they didn't even move him.

When they had him stabilized, they took him into the Intensive Care Unit. We sat in the lobby and we waited and waited. I just couldn't believe this was happening. This was the first time Dave had been sick while with me.

When Dr. Owens came out to see Harry and me, he said to us, "If he makes it through the night...." That was all I heard. I dropped my purse, and the next thing I knew Harry was shaking me.

Harry said, "Vi, the doctor is trying to talk to you." I just wasn't expecting to hear something like that. It was so shocking. At first I felt numb, then I began to shake. The doctor asked Harry to take me to get some coffee. We came back and sat there waiting and praying.

I hadn't felt such a heavy, painfully aching heart since my mother died. It was morning by the time they let us go to him. For the next four days he was kept in ICU. When he could be put into a regular room, he was still only allowed family to visit him. He was holding his own, but still didn't seem to be doing very well.

Channel 24 news had reported that he was hospitalized. He was receiving many sentiments through cards and phone calls. He couldn't have a phone in his room, so the receptionist had to tell the callers he couldn't take their calls. This was until one day when his nurse was walking by the receptionist as a call came in for him. The nurse asked who it was that was calling?

The receptionist told her, "He calls himself Marty Robbins from Nashville, Tennessee."

The nurse knew that name and said, "I'll go get Mr. Stogner!"

Harry was there at the time. Each day he'd bring Dave the morning newspaper so he could look at the sports page. Harry and the nurse helped him into a wheelchair and took him out to the phone. He talked with Marty for quite a long time. For Dave, friends like Marty were like members of his family. Marty told him if he were in Nashville, he'd put him on the bus and take him on tour. That really lifted Dave's spirits.

His nurse was so excited about Marty being on the phone, that he handed her the receiver and had Marty say "Hi" to her.

She said, "My Dad would put himself in the hospital if Marty Robbins would call him!"

Dave was in the hospital for twenty-one days. When he was well enough, all the nurses wanted his autograph. After he was released, we sent a large sheet cake to all the staff to thank them for their help. We especially wanted to thank Dr. Owens for the excellent care he had given Dave. Of course, his friends didn't let him forget that he was in a "children's hospital!" One of them said to him, "You old-

time Country Western stars will do anything to not admit your age!”

He had wonderful friends, though, like Cubbie and his family. Cubbie saw to it that Dave’s business was taken care of while he couldn’t be there. He was also faithful about visiting Dave when he could have visitors. During one visit, he told Dave about a time when his sister had taken him to Tulare to see a movie when he was about thirteen years old. While they waited for the bus, they went into a restaurant called the White Front. He told him there were two guys up in front on a stage playing music. One was playing a fiddle and the other a guitar. He said they had made a lasting impression on him.

Dave hadn’t said a word, and then he began volunteering his knowledge of the scene. Dave told him that had been his brother, J.B., and himself playing. Cubbie was surprised, and Dave was amazed that Cubbie had seen him back then. What a small world he had thought.

It was time for Dave to do some recuperating. We had already rented our home out for the summer, so we did go to Aptos in July. We thought it would be a good place for him to recuperate and rest from working and performing. Recuperating never meant retirement to him, though.

Dave said he was just too stubborn to quit. He said he’d tell himself he had done well, and he wasn’t going to do any better. Then he’d ask himself, “Do I give it up or always reach for more?”