

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

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

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### EPILOG

Throughout Dave Stogner's musical career, he has been loved and applauded by the people to whom he devoted his life. These are the people who made up the audiences from Texas to California, to Nashville and back that he wanted to perform for and to entertain. These are his contemporaries in the music business who admired him and his work, including the young musicians just getting started who were helped and encouraged by him. These people include countless friends outside the entertainment business who have valued knowing him.

Most importantly, these are the members of Dave's family who cherish him and their memories of him. His wife, Viola, has spent much of her life perpetuating his. She is devoted to their sons and grandchildren, and by opening up her heart to tell her and Dave's story she has brought the family into a closeness that they had not had before.

After Dave's death, Vi moved into the new house across the street from Dan and his family. Dan's charming two-year-old son, Forrest, would often come to his grandmother's house to visit her. With the love and tenderness of this small child, she began her ascent out of the dark days. Forrest would sit in Dave's rocker to watch cartoons, and sometimes take naps there. One day when he heard her crying, he came up to her. He patted her on the arm, and then hugged her saying, "Don't cry, Nana." It was Forrest who mostly helped Vi through this difficult period of her life. What also helped was her promise to Dave to never give up on his dream to keep Western Swing alive.

In his last years, Dave had been recognized and honored for his contribution to Country Western music. In 1984, Reimar Binge of West Germany released a remake of Dave's 1957 Decca album on Cattle records. A label that is dedicated to preserve and present all real old Country and Western style music. The following year they released another album using some of Dave's earlier Western Swing band music with some newer Country music. Both albums were released in other countries as well as in the United States. They are still available on the Internet today.

Dave's recording of *Oh Sweet Mama* was selected by the Country Music Foundation for the official Archive Collection produced by the Franklin Mint Record Society. The collection is titled *The Greatest Country Music Recordings of All Time*. In the text of an accompanying brochure is said, "Brown [Milton] comes through

most clearly in Dave's work." A copy of this record and photos are also in the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville. His white fiddle, photos, and records are on display in the West Coast Country Museum in Bakersfield.

The Western Swing Society was formed in September of 1981 by a group of California individuals interested in perpetuating and preserving Western Swing music. The Society set forth a goal of honoring music artists and other associated individuals, and creating a Hall of Fame display so that their contributions to the general music industry can be recognized.

Dave was recognized and inducted into the Western Swing Society Hall of Fame at their 7th Annual Festival, October 2, 1988, at the Texas Saloon in North Highlands, California. He joined other inductees including Bill Woods, Bob Wills, Curly Roberts, Joe Holley, Leon McAuliffe and Roy Nichols. In honor of his induction, Dave received a certificate of recognition from the California State Assembly.

Vi and Dave attended the affair with his sisters, Merle and Judy. Dave proudly went up on stage and made his acceptance speech. He thanked the Society, introduced his family, and talked about Western Swing music. Coincidentally, Patsy Montana was inducted at that same time. Vi was pleased to have the opportunity to meet her. After all, this was the person who had put the fanciful notions into Vi's young mind to be a "cowboy's sweetheart!"

In 1989, one of Dave's life-long dreams was fulfilled when Milton Brown was inducted by the Western Swing Society in California. Here Milton's unique style of music will be preserved, as well. Vi was asked to receive this award because it was Dave who had nominated Milton, but she had them notify Milton's brother, Roy Lee, and he came to receive the award in honor of his brother. In his acceptance speech, he spoke highly of Dave.

An important dream for Dave was to see his biography published. The Christmas before he passed away, Judy Malmin and her husband, Jeff, came to visit Vi and Dave. They brought him a Christmas gift. When he opened it, there was a brown leather bound book with shiny gold letters that read *IT WASN'T EASY WAS IT* by Dave Stogner and Judy Malmin.

Jeff had surprised them by preparing two books from the unfinished manuscript; one for each of them. Dave was just thrilled to have his book in his hands. After that, when he was so ill, he'd often sit in his rocking chair holding that book, leafing through it, and reading sections over and over.

When Vi began the continuation of Dave's book, she was very concerned about what Dave would think and what their sons would think. Dave was truly the love of her life and she knew she'd trade all her tomorrow's to have him back for one day. She knew she needed to share this love with their family, no matter what the outcome.

Her greatest concern was for Daryl. After his father's death, he had drifted away from her. She and his brother, David, were out of contact with him and didn't know how to reach him. She had been close to Dan, Michael, and David, and they had basically told her to say whatever she wanted in the book. She just didn't know how Daryl would accept it.

*As fate would have it, Daryl came across his father's Rockabilly Hall of Fame site that Vi had arranged. When Daryl happened to find it, he saw Vi's email address and sent a message to her. Once she was in contact with Daryl, she explained what she was doing with the book. He told her he understood, and that is when he began his contributions to the story:*

*"I think Vi and I are on the same wavelength about how important it is to keep Dad's memory, and to pass along something he and I shared. I know he would be tickled that his grandson, Sean, has the music in him, too. I gave him the bass Dad and I bought together in 1965. He's a natural at playing. He has an ear for music and picks up chord progressions without effort.*

*As I look back on my life, Dad is a real treasure to me. He took me into his world and made me a part of something that many could only dream of. I must mention Vi, as well. I know that Dad loved Vi, and there's no doubt in my mind that she loved my Dad. She stood by him and supported his dreams. She was there for him and she made him very happy. She has always been very dedicated to him, and I respect her for her love for him. Dad and Vi seem to have found what most people look for their entire lives and never find. If there were a competition over who Dad's biggest fan is, it would be neck and neck between Vi and me. But, I think she'd win...just barely, and that is saying a lot!*

*I still play informally, and have since taught myself guitar. As a law enforcement officer, I had to fight off the urge to play music, so I could concentrate on my career. But now that I'm retired, I have given in. Dad's been all over this house pushing me. It's hard to write about, but I can feel him around me. He's here now as I write this. So he knows what I'm up to, and I can't help but feel he's the instigator once again to get me to play Country music. I know he has much more important things to do, but he knew I missed playing and I needed it just like he did. It's not a profession. It's being alive. Musicians feel the music. We don't just play it. We live within it. That was Dad, damned if it isn't me too!*

*Vi gave me my Dad's last song that he was working on before he became ill. It is about his love for Vi, and I'm going to finish it. She also sent me one of his fiddles. I think I will try to teach myself to play the darn thing. I used to take lessons, but had it in my thick head that I wanted to play trumpet! Had I only known in second*

*grade how much I could have used learning to play the violin. OK, fiddle, Dad!"*

Being in contact with all four of their sons has been a blessing for Vi. Now she knows they will understand and appreciate just what she and Dave shared. Also, late one evening while she sat alone at her computer typing information for the book, she was listening to a Massachusetts-based Country music radio station on the Internet. The voice that came through cyberspace was that of none other than *Dave Stogner singing Yes Sir*. It was pretty close to a spiritual experience. It made Vi feel as though Dave were letting her know, too, that he definitely understands.

Dave has left us with his memories, his love, and his music, and thanks to the loving efforts of his wife Viola, his is a living legacy.