

We were an Air Force family.

I was conceived in Alaska, born in Mass. The family then moved to SC but the first place I have any real memories of is Phoenix AZ, living with my aunt's family and getting so many shots that we couldn't lift our arms, while we awaited our departure to Turkey.

When my father first told us we had been assigned to Turkey I, of course, saw us all walking into a large roasted Turkey, lacking any other frame of reference. Instead, we were in an arid land where soldiers and donkeys walked the streets and we weren't allowed to eat anything from local markets for fear of hepatitis. Mother bought most everything at the commissary and soaked fruits and vegetables in bleach.

There was no TV in Turkey which I didn't know enough to miss but my three older siblings did. Instead, we ran amok like the ugly Americans we were and we had books and music. My parents were both music lovers, my father had been in band through college and had an affinity for classical music and opera. He taught us the nuisance of a "proper 1812" and cried when he listened to his favorite opera, Verdi's *Aida*.

They had an extensive collection of record albums with all the singers of the era; Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Lena Horne, Ella Fitzgerald, Louie Armstrong and Judy Garland, to name a few. And there were musicals; The Music Man, West Side Story, Carousel, Porgy and Bess and The King and I.

There was also the Kingston Trio, where I began to learn folk music and a family favorite, Tom Lehrer. Lehrer was a satirist with songs like “Poisoning Pigeons in the Park,” “The Masochism Tango” and “The Vatican Rag.” We knew them all and I think it reflected my parents rather twisted humor. Dad had nicknames for everyone and everything and many little ditties that we all sang in the car. Mother tended toward her artistic side and did things like paint a pink elephant on our apartment’s ceiling to cover up a water stain.

Sounds like a fun filled family, eh? Not exactly. While we were in Turkey my brother David had rheumatic fever and missed a year of school and I spent way too much time at the hospital with pneumonia. My mother became very adept at crushing penicillin tablets with two spoons and mixing the powder with sugar water to help cover the taste.

My brothers despised one another and were extremely violent towards each other, and me since I couldn’t and wouldn’t fight back. My parents weren’t much better and had vicious screaming matches throughout their time together. Dad never had to discipline my sister and I but he frequently beat the hell out of the boys for fighting.

During that time, we also experienced the Turkish Revolution that put Ataturk into power and the front page of the Turkish papers featured bodies hanging from the gallows. We were quarantined to our yard and the only difference we saw was the number of soldiers increased and several of our Turkish neighbors, who had been in the government, disappeared.

My father was in OSI, the Office of Special Investigation, mostly dealing with the black market. But there were spooks, aka CIA and other federal agents as well as Turkish agents everywhere, including at the cocktail parties my parents threw. I’ve often wondered what Dad was involved in during the revolution.

Toward the end of our time there, we took a grand tour of Europe, including picking up a Volkswagen bus in Germany. We saw the sites in Greece, Mother never skipping a church or gallery with Ellen and I, while Dad ran the boys ragged elsewhere. In Italy we saw Dad's opera, *Aida*, in an ancient amphitheater, sitting on stone benches. What I remember most is during the Triumphal March there were actual horses, camels and elephants walking across the immense stage. And during Celeste Aida, seeing tears running down Dad's face.

When we left Turkey, the only family we knew who hadn't gotten hepatitis, the four of us kids were dumped with our grandparents in Ohio while our parents got settled in Arlington, VA. I'm pretty sure it was so they could sort out their relationship and attempt to stay together "for the kids," otherwise we would not be subjected to Pat and Madelyn for months since they hated Dad more than Mother did and seriously despised my brother David for keeping them together in the first place. They treated him terribly and he acted out by kicking holes in the walls.

We finally reunited in Arlington and my father went to work every morning at the Pentagon. Being in such close proximity to DC we had so much culture to enjoy and ran amok in the mall, which was wide open in those days. We went from one museum to the other and Dad would challenge the boys to race one another to the top of the Washington monument.

We went to Army band concerts at Fort Myer right next to the Iwa Jima memorial. We went to see Peter, Paul and Mary and Simon and Garfunkel and my sister even allowed me to come along to Baltimore where we saw the Beatles on their first American tour. Not that you could hear much other than the screaming.

My sister played piano, my brothers were in school bands and all I wanted was to play the guitar. My version of begging was leaving notes all over the house and, eventually, my parents got the message and bought me a classical guitar and set me up with lessons. I didn't last long at the lessons because I had no interest in classical guitar but I stuck around long enough to learn the basic chords so I could start figuring out the songs I really wanted to play.

Dad was in Vietnam for a year while the rest of us were in Arlington, a very long haul for my mother, especially with the boys who were just as violent as ever. My Uncle Joe, not a real uncle but a close family friend, was the designated boy beater and came when Mother called to try to get them back under control.

Dad came back, never wanting to talk about what went on in SE Asia, and we were reassigned to Florida and Eglin Air Force Base, the largest in the world, where Dad was to work on laser guided missiles for use in Vietnam. He bought us a house in Ft. Walton Beach and we moved again.

My oldest siblings graduated high school in Arlington and Ellen stayed in Virginia for college. David started high school and I began Junior High in FWB. Brother Ed came along and enrolled in the junior college.

I once again begged and pleaded, and my parents replaced the classical guitar with a six string Conn guitar. I chose it because it was all blonde wood. I spent a lot of my free working on figuring out the chords to songs I liked, an arduous task from a record album, playing one line and copying it down until you had all the lyrics, then doing the same thing, lifting the needle back to try to figure out the chords.

Then I discovered Judy Collins. I was so in love with her singing and the songs she chose. There was a lot of old folk music on her early albums, which is what I was really drawn to. On her later albums there was a lot of political songs and, from her, I learned who Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Ricard and Mimi Farnia were and, eventually, Joni Mitchell. Joni took me down a whole new road though I could play very few of her songs because she used lots of special tunings.

I started playing at school talent shows and one year my mother made me a full length, dark green crushed velvet dress for one of the shows. With my long almost blond hair, I felt just like Judy.

There was a folk club at my high school and we got together to share songs. My brother David was also playing guitar and introduced me to his music, a lot of hard rock like Cream, but he also had “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” a bluegrass compilation by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band. I did not know bluegrass, but I loved it and went to work learning most the songs on the double album.

And then there was John Prine. David had a couple of his albums and I was completely blown away by his writing. I learned a number of his songs, many of which I play today.

Dad had another deployment to the war and spent a year testing the laser guided missiles he had helped to develop. As the war finally wound down, he retired from the Air Force saying he finally understood what he did for a living, finding better and more efficient ways to kill people. This after flying bombers in World War II, shuttling from Alaska to Korea, and two tours in the Vietnam War. I truly believe the reason Dad made a career of the Air Force was because his great love was flying.

One summer a local church opened up a teen coffee house and David, my only boyfriend Don, and I went. There were lots of kids there that played guitar and sang. Don's parents had a motel on the sound and we would stage shows there for the entertainment of the guests. All the shows ended with some song and dance routine with Don and his dad, who was in vaudeville when he was a young man.

I didn't go to college the first year out of high school, just took a few classes at the junior college, and worked at a Greek restaurant on the beach with my best friend Maria, who I was madly in love with. We did everything at the restaurant from waiting tables to bartending, illegally, and a couple nights a week I would play in the lounge. That's where I learned to put together a set list and how to incorporate more known songs with the ones that I really liked to play and sing.

I went off to Florida State in Tallahassee with Maria in tow. Don came along to get his masters and we lived together. David was there getting his masters and living with his girlfriend in the same apartment complex. We shared a big old Ford coupe that Dad dumped on us.

Sister Ellen was married and living in Tallahassee so she would have us over for cookouts and such. I had shared a room with Ellen much of my childhood but she was six years older so we had much different interests and really didn't know one another. That wouldn't change for another twenty years when she started visiting Jill and I after we moved to South Dakota.

The first year in Tallahassee, my mother came for a visit and sat us down to tell us she and Dad were getting divorced. All Ellen, David and I could think was, "it's about time" but I'm sure Mother was expecting us to be upset about it.

I met Jim from an ad in the campus post office. He was looking for a music partner so I called him. Jim was and is an extremely accomplished musician, playing guitar, keyboards and flute, among others. We were called, Pure and Easy for the song by the Who, and started playing the bars in Tallahassee that had live music pretty much every weekend. Jim had really diverse musical interests and I heard music I never had before. But what I really took away from several years together was the joy of rehearsing for hours a week to get the songs just right, how good it felt to blend voices with someone and the high of being on stage and having a room full of people listening to you.

I had my first relationship with a woman, who I lived with my senior year of college. During that time, I discovered women's music when it appeared as a tiny section at a record store in town. I bought everything and was learning songs by Casse Culver, The Berkley Women's Music Collective and Meg and Cris.

When Frances and I graduated, both of us in art education, we moved to Clearwater where interning awaited us. Jim joined us when I did not get a job the first fall and he had finished his masters. We played music all up and down the beach, while Frances went to work as a high school art teacher. When she and I decided to split up, and got separate places, Jim packed up and went back to Tallahassee. I started teaching art the next fall.

I continued to figure out songs and spent many hours playing by myself. It was my favorite thing to do. I remember sitting on the porch at one of the houses we rented in Clearwater, every day after school just playing and singing. It was always so satisfying in a way that nothing else was except, maybe, art.

Then a fling took me to a 7-11 to meet Leslie, who was working there while going to college part time. We talked very little but all agreed to move her piano into her new apartment the next day. We were young and stupid and four of us hauling an upright piano up two flights of stairs seemed completely reasonable.

Leslie played for me, I played for her and the only song we had in common was *Ventura Highway* but we somehow connected completely. We started getting together sharing songs and working out harmonies and when I introduced Leslie to women's music, she understood it completely and wanted to share it just as I did. It seemed almost like a calling to spread the word to other women and Leslie felt the same.

We got a copy of the *Changer and the Changed* songbook and did every song in it. We also did most of Holly Near's *Imagine My Surprise* album, and, among many others, a kick ass version of *Leaping Lesbians*.

Leslie bought an electric piano and soon we were performing at a women's bar, the Dockside, on the beach. And we were being heard. The women began to know the songs and when we played *Sister*, the whole bar would be standing up singing along.

We were the only game in town and played for all the NOW and other women's groups benefits and events like Take Back the Night. We got well known enough to get a gig at Eckerd College and open for Teresa Trull in Tampa.

We went on road trips all over the state and saw Meg at a tiny church in Tallahassee, Ferron in St. Pete, Holly at the Pagoda in St. Augustine and the Carnegie Hall concert in Tampa. We were constantly inspired by the music and continued to love performing it.

I met my partner of 23 years at one of our shows. Jill was sitting right up front and told me she knew all the songs we were doing and had even seen Meg several times at a bar in Washington DC. I didn't believe a word of it but it turned out to be true. She had just gotten out of the Army, her last station had been in Arlington. She knew all the places we hung out as kids on 23rd Street and lived in Crystal City which was being built while we were there. Small world.

Then Leslie ran off to join the circus. Actually, she joined a traveling church group, that played around the country but I was devastated to lose her. We kept touch writing letters and I, occasionally, played a solo gig or ran an open mic at the Dockside. It was Jill and my second home and we were there most weekends anyway.

Mary and Margret loved to cook and had a pool so they often had barbeques at their place. At one of them, Mary took me by the arm and said there was someone I just had to meet and "she plays guitar just like you." Of course, being the local big dog, I discounted that figuring if she was any good, I would know about her. At the far end of the Florida room sat a slim woman with curly brown hair and a look that said she had heard about me and wasn't impressed either.

After dinner, Mary insisted Jody play for us. She casually opened a black case and brought out a Martin guitar. After tuning a bit, she played about five songs and completely blew me away. Her guitar playing and voice were amazing but more so, there was a confident aura about her that drew you in. Not to mention she was hot. I think everyone in the room was instantly in love with her. I know I was.

I then played a few songs, which all the women there knew from seeing me alone or with Leslie. I knew my audience and played to them while Jody watched me seriously, as though I was at the audition of my life.

I passed back the guitar to Jody and got little more than a nod. I got another beer and went out to the living room to try to sort out my very ruffled feelings. I sat looking out the window at some kids throwing a football in the dusk knowing I was completely intrigued and intimidated by Jody and wishing, as always, that Leslie was there.

Jody came into the room, sat on a sofa across from me and bummed a cigarette. We sat smoking and drinking and we exchanged the basics of where and with whom we had played. Jody had been the front singer for a rock band in St. Pete but it had split up. She told me she was playing solo at a bar on St. Pete beach the next weekend and invited me to come. I would only have missed it if I had managed to expire in the coming week.

So began our partnership. We played together at her house and soon discovered we had lots of songs in common and the ones we didn't we both wanted to learn. I told her about women's music and she didn't get the concept at all. I remember the puzzled look on her face when I explained it was music by and for women. She asked, like Bonnie Raitt? I tried to explain the difference but she didn't get it, though she liked the individual songs and was willing to learn them.

In a couple of weeks, I had booked us at the Dockside and we had enough material for one set together, then a set each. The last night we rehearsed she brought home two t-shirts with Buffalo Shoes printed on the front and informed me that was our name. I asked her to explain but the answer was weird enough, guinea pigs walking in their own poop, that I just gave up and smiled like the idiot she often made me feel like.

Leslie was recalled from the circus in time for Jill and my holy union, where I sang our song, *Soaring* by Cris. We had a party afterward, which I invited Jody to. Leslie and I played, Jody played and then we became a trio. Despite Leslie's arguments to the contrary, Jody told her we rehearsed on Tuesday and Thursday at 6:00 and to be there. Leslie knew she was beat and hurriedly found a place to live and moved back to St. Pete.

There was magic playing with Leslie, there always had been. We were symbiotic and always knew what each other was thinking about a song and how to arrange it. Jody really raised the stakes. She had a very emotive voice, could play lead guitar, and put together harmonies that made both Leslie and I better.

Rehearsals were long, involved and very liquid as Jody had her vodka and I had my beer. Most nights we worked hard on new material, others the alcohol got the better of Jody and I and we took to the streets, with Leslie, the non-drinker, driving.

One night we drove halfway to Tallahassee because Jody had never been there and another we stuck up the Dockside with squirt guns. Jody and I ended up in an epic wrestling match on the bar floor, while everyone cheered us on. The physical proximity to Jody was overwhelming.

And some nights Jody could be found sitting in the dark listening to music and too far gone to get any work done. On other nights we would get into vicious arguments about what music to play and getting better paying gigs and more exposure.

I loved performing with Leslie but the three of us was a total high, something that is hard to explain if you've never felt it. The audience loved Jody's addition and all the women flirted with her, though cautiously, since they, like me, were completely enamored with her but also intimidated.

We were at odds from the beginning about where we were going with our music. My fantasy was to cut a record for Olivia and tour and Jody, wanting nothing to do with a small, women's label, totally dismissed that as ridiculous. She insisted we needed to learn more Top 40 so we had more options of where to play.

We created a promo pack and I would roll it up into red mailing tubes and send it off to bars all over the state. I spent many an afternoon after school visiting bars and trying to get us gigs. We started playing at a tiny dive bar in St. Pete because the owner told me it was a musician's bar and he could help us get other gigs. When all of our fans from the Dockside showed up to hear us, the owner finally asked me if we were gay. I said, yes. Then he asked, Jody too? He was crushed when I told him she was.

We did not get gigs at the big, dance bars in downtown St. Pete, bars where Jody insisted the money was. I didn't care at all about money, or getting known in straight bars and Leslie was caught somewhere in the middle between really needing the money for school and loving the music we had done together.

Then along came Kimberly. We all knew her from open mics and she was a very good guitar player and decent vocalist. Leslie cozied up to her when Jody went to visit her family for Christmas and though I was invited to play with them I only went a couple of times, not trusting Kimberly at all. And then I knew the shit had hit the fan when she told me she was “going to take my band.” I laughed it off to her face but inside I was terrified.

When Jody came back, I picked her up at the airport and tried to tell her what had happened and that Leslie wanted Kimberly to join Buffalo Shoes. I didn’t want Kimberly, I knew it would change us forever. I tried to be factual but it was so hard.

Jody’s response was we needed to sit down and talk about it. The next rehearsal we did and all the uncertainty about where we were going came to a head and Leslie insisted Kimberly join us so we could get better paying gigs. When I expressed my opinion, and reminded Leslie of what we had once done together, she just got pissed, apparently firmly under Kimberly’s spell. Jody broke the tie between us by saying we would get together with Kimberly and see how it went.

I did not know at the time, apparently I was considered too straight because I had a real job and a relationship to tell me anything, but there were a lot of drugs involved with Kimberly. When I went to where she lived while Jody was out of town, her roommates were weighing out a table full of pot into small plastic bags. I was a little freaked out but everyone smoked pot, I told myself, though I knew that much would land us all in jail.

The pot, the alcohol and cigarettes were a given at the Dockside but Jody, Kimberly and her buddies would disappear when we took a break and come back super high. It was much later I found out cocaine had entered the picture. Jody had asthma and snorting coke did nothing for her voice and lung capacity. It also bonded Jody and Kimberly, with me completely on the outside.

We played a few times at the Dockside and then I got a phone call from Kimberly saying we were all getting together to talk. We sat on one of the docks behind the bar, me on one end, Jody on the other and Kimberly informed me that they had decided to look for gigs at the straight bars downtown. I tried to argue about original and women's music but Leslie shut down and wouldn't even discuss it. When I appealed to Jody, she leaned over so she could see me and said, "I don't want to be a goddamn queer band playing in goddamn queer bars."

That went through me like a sword to the heart. In an attempt to hold on to a little of my dignity, I told them the gig on Saturday night would be my last. I got up, stumbled to my car and went home.

We played the last time as though we were strangers while the audience, who had heard the news, cried through the third set. It was horrible and I was torn between laughing and throwing up. At the end of the night, I packed my gear and left.

The three of them tried a few iterations with other women but none of them lasted. Being a glutton for punishment, I went to several of their gigs and felt more miserable than ever.

I played for a while with a woman, Linda, who was a great songwriter and singer. It was good but not the same connection and she eventually moved to Nashville to make it big. Sadly, she didn't.

A few years later, Leslie, Jody and I played one more time at a benefit concert. The rehearsals were almost like the old times, as was the performance. Jody tried to talk me into coming back, and when I said no, she was furiously angry. I guess we all had a lot invested, for me emotionally, and there was too much hurt to overcome.

As much as it pained me, I put my guitar in away and didn't play again for ten years.