

Only A Memory Away - The Dave and Vi Stogner Story

(A history of his music and their romance)

CHAPTER TWO

Capitola, California

July 30, 2000

Vi and Marie had just returned from a walk on the beach. Vi was eagerly awaiting her granddaughter's arrival. She was anxious to tell Bethany more about herself and Dave, and she knew Bethany was ready to listen. She knew, too, that it would take her some time to be able to explain it the way she needed to explain it. It wasn't something she could jump right into out of the blue.

Bethany knew how much her grandparents had loved one another. She had grown up with that love. They had always been her Nana and Papa. She couldn't imagine them not being together, but she knew they'd both had previous relationships before they married. Now her grandmother wanted to open the closet of her past, and she wanted Bethany to know all about it. She had no idea what her grandmother was going to tell her or what influence it might have on the family. It was a mystery to her.

Vi was sitting at the beach house computer when Bethany walked in. "I'm still not great with computers," she remarked as she stood to greet her smiling granddaughter.

"Nana, you're never too old to learn!" Bethany scolded her in a joking way as she looked around the room. "It looks different from the last time I was here." That had been when it was elaborately decorated for her bridal shower back in August.

Marie joined in the greeting and for a few minutes the three of them chatted about the shower and the wedding. Bethany was as vibrant and joyful as she had been on her wedding day. The first thing on Vi's mind was to explain to her about the possibility of the completion of her grandfather's unfinished biography. She explained about talking with Judy and making arrangements for her to help.

"When Dave spent time with Judy reminiscing, he only talked about his music career. He didn't want to say anything about his personal life. I've made a well-thought-out decision to go beyond what Dave expressed in his story by including mine. And, that will make it personal."

"Nana, this sounds intriguing. I've wondered about your past with Papa, such as

how the two of you met. I know no one has ever said much about that, other than all of you knew each other in Fresno when my father was younger. I never quite understood all the family connections."

Marie told Bethany, "Your grandmother has shared with me some of the information about her past. I think you'll see everything clearly when you hear what she has to tell you."

Vi sat back down at the computer. Using a computer was new to her. It had only been a few months ago that her grandson, Jason, had bought her a brand-new computer and a 19-inch monitor. He had set it up for her and given her some basic lessons on how to use it. She hadn't known where to start. Jason explained about how she could even search for her ancestors on the Internet.

She had become interested in genealogy several years prior, so she had decided to pursue that. She was so excited when she found information about her family history that she jumped right into learning more about using the computer. She even signed up for a computer class. She very much wanted to find information to share with her family, especially Bethany. She had already traced the Stogner name, but she had found little about the name Cargill.

Vi pointed to the monitor and had Bethany read the information she had recently found. It was about Vi's mother and her family. Bethany had never known her great grandmother, Mary Susan Cargill Bridge. She had passed away due to a stroke long before Bethany was born. Vi had told her stories about her, though, and Bethany was always eager to learn more about her family history. She knew her grandmother had often told her that memories were very special, and to not let go of them. She had encouraged her to keep them alive with family and friends. So, it was becoming more important to her, too, to be able to pass on family memories.

It was a comfortable, crisp day that had warmed into a pleasant afternoon. The three of them went into the kitchen for glasses of fresh strawberry lemonade then walked out to the deck. Bethany and Marie were joking and laughing while Vi looked up at the soft blueness of the sky as she was preparing herself to begin the journey into her memories.

"Honey, of course you know a lot about my childhood from stories I've told you as you were growing up. I probably never said just how early my childhood ended, though. It wasn't long after I became interested in boys. I think you need to know that to realize how everything happened." Vi was ready and she began her story.

I hadn't had much experience with boys. I had always been around them, especially because of all my brothers' friends. In the ninth grade, I did like a certain boy and my girlfriend started giving me notes from him. I'd answer them and give them back to her to pass to him. Finally, I got tired of the three-way

stuff, so I decided it was time to go to him and ask about us. My girlfriend just fell over laughing because it was her doing all the writing. The boy didn't know anything about it. I was so mad at her that I didn't speak to her for days.

I casually dated a couple of boys, but always with a group of friends. One of my brothers' good friends was twenty years old. He and I liked each other. His sister was my best friend, so we all hung around together. I was only sixteen when I made a decision to marry him, for reasons other than being madly in love. He was going into the service. I had a plan that I could marry him and move out on my own. He'd be away in the service and I'd get his allotment money to live on. This was as far as my sixteen-year-old mind could foresee, even if my mother did think I had ESP.

My mother thought I shouldn't marry, of course, but I won her over. She signed for me and his father signed for him. We were married on May 15, 1944, at the Fresno County Courthouse. Afterwards, we moved into a little one- bedroom house that we rented. I didn't have a lot of possessions. I took clothing and things like my diary where I put all my dreams away.

My plans didn't work out the way I had thought, though. He was injured and got out of the service three months later. So, there I was only sixteen years old and I had quit school and I was living with a husband. At first, I was happy and he seemed to love me. He was good to me and took care of me when I was pregnant with Daniel, who was born the next year. I worked off and on in some local cafes and I was a carhop, too, like you have seen in movies about the 1950s. My mother-in-law took care of Danny when I worked.

When I was twenty years old, Michael was born. I became a stay-at-home mom. I adored my boys. I did everything for them. I even made a lot of their clothes, mostly little shirts and jackets. It was to save money, but I loved doing it. I cared for my boys and took care of our home. My husband had a big family and we had good times together with them.

In 1950, we bought a house out near my mother's place and we lived there for the next two years. My husband was a hard worker. In fact, he devoted his time to work and to hunting and fishing instead of to his family. He had begun to change, not long after we moved to the house. It had got to the point that I wanted to leave him, but I had nowhere to go. Even my mother wouldn't let me move back home once I had the boys. He hadn't abused them. In his way, he loved them. He just didn't have time for them, but they loved their dad no matter what so I did the best I could.

Vi had known that when she got to the years she had spent with her children's father she wouldn't say all she could. She felt that there was no reason to dredge up that part of her memories. It wasn't until she was out of that relationship, though, that she had realized just how badly she had been treated. Being

humiliated and intimidated by her husband had been a way of life. He had controlled everything she did even to buying a dress for herself. She'd had to ask his permission. He had liked to drink and had often been abusive, not so much physically but emotionally. It was the kind of abuse that doesn't heal.

"That's as far as I can go with this story now," Vi said as she changed the subject. "I have something I brought for you, Bethany. Let's go inside. It's in the living room." They walked in and Vi reached for the gift on the end table. Bethany knew her grandmother very well. She knew she gave freely, especially gifts to touch on memory or to bring back a moment in time. She shared memories, but she never dwelled on or harped on the past. As she opened the gift, she realized she was right. Here was a most sentimental gesture, and it immediately brought back precious memories of her past.

By the time she lifted the little wooden box out of its wrapping, she was overcome with emotion. She raised the lid of the box, and there was the set of ivory dominoes that she and her grandfather had played with so many times. Inside the lid, Vi had placed a photograph of Bethany and Dave taken during one of their games.

Vi tenderly said to her granddaughter, "I knew this was going to be a time when you learn a lot more about your grandfather, so I thought it was appropriate to give you this now." With tear-filled eyes, she thanked her grandmother. She moved over to sit by her on the couch and put her arms around her. As they hugged each other, Marie could not help it. She had tears in her eyes, too, having witnessed this touching moment.

Vi said, "I'm also giving you a copy of the manuscript I've saved for so long that tells about Dave's music career. It's over there in the little suitcase on the table, if you'd like to take it out. I'd like you to read it while you're at the family cabin. It will almost be like your grandfather talking to you. Then when you come back here later in the week, I'll tell you more of what I want to say."

Bethany wiped her tears with a tissue as she walked to the table. She reached inside the suitcase and dug out the manuscript that was bound with plastic. The first thing she saw was an old, yellowed newspaper clipping with a photo of *Dave Stogner and The Western Rhythmaires*.

"That's Papa!" she noticed. "He looks like James Garner!"

"Actually, he looks like James Garner because they are second cousins."

"Wow!" Bethany exclaimed. "You never told me!"

"There's a lot of things I haven't told you, sweetie." Vi smiled.

