

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

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

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### CHAPTER SEVEN

#### Barstow and Coarsegold, California

1972-1973

Vi looked at Bethany, "That's quite a long love affair. Huh?"

"Nana, I love you," Bethany softly replied. "I'm sure everyone will understand about you and Papa. You've been so loving, and we all love both of you. When two people are meant to be together as you two obviously were, I think everyone should just look at the beauty of your love."

Marie added, "Dave opened up life for Vi, and they found themselves falling into that forever kind of love while they were married to others. They stayed in their marriages 'for better or for worse' beyond what a lot of people would have, but their affair of the heart still blossomed into a great love."

Vi knew Marie had always been a sympathetic listener and had been supportive. She had felt sure that Bethany would be, too. She was very comfortable now, sharing these experiences that she held so dear.

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My divorce was final on January 17, 1972. I just walked away from my previous life. I could have had half of our home, appliance repair shop, mountain cabin, two cars, and two bank accounts. My ex-husband told me that was the price I was going to pay for Dave Stogner. I told him that it was worth every penny of it! That period of time wasn't a nice scene for us. There is no need to rehash any of that experience. Once we were free we never, never wanted to look back.

Dave and I had known we'd marry as soon as our divorces were finalized. We hadn't set a date, though. When we left Las Vegas, we had decided to move to the desert to Barstow. We moved into a new mobile home that Dave bought. I got busy making curtains and decorating. We were like two peas in a pod, that's for sure. We never argued, and we usually had a great time together. Dave went back to his business, and then he returned to his music. Even though he was semi-retired, he still needed to play his fiddle. He'd say that the good times just took over the good ol' times!

He began playing five nights a week in a four-piece band at the Player's Club. Camp Irwin, a Marine base, was located not too far from the club. The place was usually filled with Marines by nine o'clock in the evening. He was always supportive of the folks in the armed forces. He liked performing for them, and I always enjoyed going with him to be entertained, too.

On May 15, I gave him a birthday party. According to him, it was the first birthday party he had ever had. David, Judy and their boys, David and Daryl, were there. Dave's brothers, Orville and Bill, and their families came, too. They played music and made ice cream. Dave loved homemade ice cream. We enjoyed ourselves, and all of them seemed to like me. His brothers lived in Boron, which was only thirty miles from us, so we visited them often.

Dave's divorce had become final in late June, so we were ready to get married. One night in July, he joined Orville to play at a club in Boron. We made a plan to drive to Las Vegas after they finished their performance. Orville had just bought a new Cadillac, so we piled into the car and went off to the big event. Dave's niece, Jeanne, was driving. Orville's wife, Billie, and Jeanne's fiancé, Ray, were sitting up front with her. Orville, Dave, and I were in the back seat. It was about five o'clock in the morning when we arrived there.

We were at the intersection of Sarah and Las Vegas Boulevard when a car came out of nowhere and hit us broadside. The three of us in the back seat were able to get out. The emergency people had to pry the car open to get the others out of the front. We were all hurt, but Jeanne and Billie were the worse. My legs hit the metal bar that went across the bottom of the front seat. Blood clots began to form immediately. Dave's hand was hurt. We were taken to the hospital by ambulance before the other two were out of the car. People were lined up on the sidewalk watching. A guy strung out on drugs driving a beat up old car hit us. He wasn't wearing a shirt or shoes. He didn't even get hurt.

Dave, Orville, and Ray were released from the hospital, but I wasn't released until two-thirty that afternoon. I had to use crutches to walk. Jeanne and Billie had to stay in the hospital, so Orville stayed there with them. We were in Las Vegas to get married, though, so that was what we were going to do.

Dave's niece, Yvonne, and her husband, Don, had come from Bakersfield to be at our wedding, along with some other relatives. They became our witnesses for the ceremony. Everything had changed because of the accident. Instead of going to the chapel, we were married by a judge at the courthouse.

When the judge asked Dave to take my hand. I said, "If he does, I'll fall down!" I wasn't joking. I was barely holding myself up with the crutches.

Yvonne told the judge, "She put up a struggle, but we got her here!"

It was July 9, 1972, and we were finally married. There wasn't too much celebrating, though. Right after the ceremony, two of Dave's nephews crossed

their arms and carried me down Las Vegas Boulevard. Every joint and every muscle in me hurt. We went to dinner at a restaurant on the Strip. After dinner, everyone toasted us as Dave helped me hobble off to our room at the Royal Las Vegas Hotel. We both hurt so much we could hardly move. It was no honeymoon night, I'll tell you that!

Dave said to me, "It wasn't easy, was it! But, aren't you glad your last name is Stogner?"

Our being together hadn't come without a price to pay, and our wedding was anything, but a bed of roses. Anyway, we were now Mr. and Mrs. Dave Stogner and we were very happy about that.

*You told me that you loved me/And my heart skipped a beat/Now I'm walking on Easy Street/I haven't got a dime/No worries on my mind/And now the sun is shining all the time/You hug me and you kiss me/Now my life is complete/And I'm walking on Easy Street/ There's something about you, Baby, makes me float in the air/And when you walk beside me makes me feel like a millionaire/My pockets overflow with dreams for us to share/And I'm walking on Easy Street.*

David and Judy came to Las Vegas the next day to see how we were, and they took us home. On the way, I had thought about my mother. When I had called my sister after the wedding, she said that Mama would roll over in her grave if she knew Dave Stogner was her son-in-law. I knew what she meant. My mother would have been excited and happy, and I had a feeling then that she did know.

According to my niece, others had known about Dave and me in the past. She said they knew we were in love, they could tell by the way we looked at each other. Maybe we couldn't hide a love like Dave and I had, but I know, at the time, they did not know the extent of our love. They probably only put two and two together after we married. We did the best we could to keep our feelings private. My sister-in-law said she respected us for waiting until our sons were grown to divorce, and others told me that, too.

Dave kept busy with his business and playing at clubs. I helped him by taking his phone calls for the aluminum siding and awning orders. There were always things to do. It was a very exciting time for us.

Dave came in from work one evening while I was cooking dinner and he said, "Turn the burners off and come with me. I want to show you somethin'."

I asked, "Can't it wait until we eat?"

He told me, "No, it can't!"

We got into the truck, and he drove me to an old dilapidated building not too far from our place. He said to me very seriously, "I rented this for you. I want to open a hamburger joint."

I looked at him and said, "You what! Who is going to be the cook?"

He pointed at me and said, "You are!"

I was in total shock! I told him I didn't know anything about cooking hamburgers, or running a hamburger joint! Besides it was an awful place, half filled with sand. I thought to myself, his mind must be filled with the other half! I asked him if he was crazy!

He couldn't hide his little prank any longer. He just started to laugh and laugh. He had pulled a good one on me that night. I was so glad he was only kidding. He was always joking and pulling stunts like that with me.

As wonderful as it was for Dave and me, we could only hope the hard times were in the past. We had some great times with family and friends, out there in the desert. Life goes on, though, and you have to take the bad with the good.

Christmas, that year, was to be our first together as husband and wife. We were looking forward to the holidays. On December 17, we were notified that my brother, Charles, had been seriously injured in an accident. He lived in San Jose with his wife, Helen. A train had hit the cement truck he was driving. Five days later he died. Dave drove me to San Jose for the funeral.

Charles and I hadn't been very close after my divorce. He got mad at me. Not because of the divorce, but because I had walked away from everything I owned. He had asked to see me before he died. I didn't know this until it was too late. It was so hard for me because Charles and I hadn't talked. We never had closure. Dave had a time with me after that because I was an emotional mess again. He was so caring and loving, though, he definitely pulled me through this.

In 1973, we received an insurance settlement for the car accident in Las Vegas. We took some time off to drive to the Sierra Nevada mountains to look for property. We had decided to move because we'd had enough of the desert. The desert had its beauty, but it was too hot in Barstow in the summer. We'd be miserable, at times. We had seen the temperature get up to one hundred seventeen degrees.

Coarsegold, being an old California mining town, was a quiet place and it was so much cooler! We found property there that we liked. It was an acre of land in the foothills at 2000-foot elevation. The acre had a lot of trees which meant a lot of shade, and after Barstow, we wanted a lot of shade! There were big boulders among the trees, and a little creek ran through the property. It was so pleasant there.

We had to spend some time having the property developed before we could move. Once the water was connected, the first thing Dave wanted to do was plant a vegetable garden. He cleared an area and planted a huge garden, so he could give vegetables to the neighbors. We bought a larger mobile home, had it moved there, and then in July we moved in. In three years I had moved around more than any other time in my life, but I was with Dave and that is as good as it gets.

Dave and Michael became partners and opened a store in Oakhurst. They sold mobile home supplies, as well as the aluminum siding and awnings. It was named Sierra Awning and Recording Company. He named it this so he'd only have to get one license and also be able to record music. Dawna and I both helped them at the store.

We were happy, and it didn't take long to settle into life in the mountains. Michael brought back my basset hound named Chant-e. He had originally bought her for me in 1968 when I was having a rough time. He had kept her for me while I was moving around. She was such a good dog and had never been a bother. Then, one day Dave saw a young female basset hound in a pet store and decided to get her for me. He felt that two dogs would be better company for me while he was working.

Bridgett Monet was what we named her. She was something else! We were going to Fresno one day at Christmas time, so we left both dogs inside for a few hours. Chant-e had always stayed indoors when I left. When we got home, the little one had just about torn up our house. She chewed the telephone cord in half. She ate all the candy hanging on the lower branches of our Christmas tree. She had dragged toilet paper through the house from the bathroom to the front room. Chant-e just sat there and looked up at us as if to say, "I didn't do it!" They were good companions, though. Every time they heard Dave's truck coming home, they would run down the road to meet him.

The people in the mountains knew who Dave was, so it wasn't long before they started calling to ask him to play. He had played occasions like the Kerman Harvest Festival in the fall of 1973 and the Mountaineers Days celebration in Oakhurst. There were many of his fans that were glad to have him performing around there. He had been on Fresno's KMJ Channel 24's twentieth anniversary special in October. After the show, the station got a lot of calls, cards, and letters from people saying how good it was to see him again.

Bob Long from KMJ had contacted him about doing that show when we were still living in Barstow. Bob had asked Dave if he could get *The Western Rhythmaires* together for it. All of the band members had stayed in Fresno. Some of them joined Dave for various engagements. So, he had called them and had made the arrangements for rehearsing and doing the show. They were so used to each other they didn't need much rehearsing, though. For them it came natural. Dave would just say, "Let's play!" He sure enjoyed having all *The Western Rhythmaires* together again, and they all thought the world of Dave.

During the summer of 1974, he was playing at the Snowline Lodge. It was not far from our home. A guy in the audience began to give him a hard time. He kept nagging Dave about when he was on television. He accused Dave of thinking he was too good. He criticized Dave for not hiring him and others he knew because they just weren't good enough to be one of *the Western Rhythmaires*. Dave, of course, kept ignoring him, but his drummer, Jimmy Walker, didn't. He'd had enough of that guy bothering Dave. He flew off that bandstand so fast and knocked the guy to the floor. Dave just kept on talking to the people. The guy left and the drummer just came back up and started playing his drums. That's the kind of loyalty the guys had for Dave. They loved him and they wouldn't stand for anybody doing that to him.

Dave worked hard in his Sierra Awning business, but he so enjoyed being involved with the music business. Besides his playing engagements, he started writing a column for Bakersfield's Country Town News. A woman named Betty Peuth had started the newspaper in 1971. His good friend Bill Woods wrote a column and he had put Betty in touch with Dave. She wanted Dave to write about what was going on in the way of entertainment in his part of the country. He'd write about entertainers he knew or ones he had most recently crossed paths with. He would write out the information, then I would rewrite it to mail to Betty. He signed his column "Ole Man from the Mountain."

We traveled to Bakersfield for the First Annual Country Music Awards sponsored by Betty. It was held in the Bakersfield Memorial Auditorium. It was by invitation only. The theme of the program was "This Is Your Life Bill Woods." Dave thought so much of Bill. He said that Bill would always "stand tall" in the Country Western field and in private life, as well. He also said that while Bill was making his own living, he always found time to promote other artists.

There were many fine artists there that night to pay Bill a well-deserved tribute. Tex Williams, Johnny Bond, Red Simpson, Mayf Nutter, Buddy Mize, Oscar Whittington, Jimmy Thomason, The Lakey Bros., George Edmunds, Sandy Thomas, Doug Sherwood, and Dusty Henson are the ones I remember.

Dave became a disc jockey for Madera's KHOT radio station. It was an all Country Western station. He taped shows and did others live. He still enjoyed his little pranks. He liked to tell his listening audience little tidbits about me, such as "My wife has the same temperament all the time. Mad!" He told them that on the way home from Madera we passed a place called the 22-Mile House. He told them we just couldn't get by that place without me getting a "whuppin."

So everybody kidded me at the clubs. They would say, "Did you get your 'whuppin' today?"

There was a local furniture store that sponsored his radio show. Once he was doing a remote broadcast from the store, and I was with him. He started interviewing me. Then, he told the owner not to sell me anything because he couldn't afford it! I was so embarrassed! We did buy furniture there.

He was humorous, but he had his romantic moments, too. During each radio show he always sent out a special song for me. *Together Again* or *I'll Always Be In Love With You* were my favorites. At the end of each of his live performances, he'd play Milton Brown's song, *I'll String Along With You*. Sometimes when he performed, people would request that song by asking him for the one he always played for his wife at the end of the evening.

With all Dave was doing, we still spent a lot of time together. One of our most romantic times was our second wedding anniversary. We had decided to stay at the Ahwanee Hotel in Yosemite. The hotel is old and very beautiful. There is a very nice restaurant in the hotel where we planned to have dinner. The evening was cool, but we wanted to sit out front on the veranda while we waited for our table. The veranda crosses the front of the hotel. You can sit there overlooking the view of deer wandering through the lush green golf course. Beyond that there is a creek of crystal clear water flowing through the tall cedar trees and the ponderosa pines. What a setting that was for us!

We were called for dinner and seated at a window table where we could still see the deer. I remember ordering rainbow trout and he had cod. We spent the night at the hotel. The next day we toured the park. We rode the tram deep into the forest of giant sequoia while a park ranger told us the history of the area.

On our way home we stopped along the Merced River. There was a spot there where we liked to go for picnics. As we walked along the water's edge, we could see the rocks on the bottom because the water was so clear there, too. Then, we drove pass the old covered bridge and Pioneer Village with all its little shops. We saw the horse-drawn wagon taking some children for a ride. I think I remember this time so well because it was the first time Dave and I had a true sense of peace. We deserved to have a beautiful time together.