

## **Red Bird**

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2007 Barbara W. Walters Memorial College Scholarship

I never realized until recently how life so subtly foreshadows itself. Scattered throughout life are tiny bits of breadcrumbs that lead us on a path of enlightenment. Those crumbs are little pieces of puzzle that so annoyingly don't fit in the expected spots. Over time those pieces put themselves together and we see the full picture. What if we never asked to see the end result?

My story begins with a song. I was probably thirteen years old when I first heard the tune "Red Bird". I had just begun learning fiddle, and my father and I were attending a music workshop at a summer camp. Being the economical father that he is, we decided to camp at a nearby campground with our RV instead of staying in a hotel.

As we settled into our camping spot, barren of human contact for several miles, another family came rolling into the spot beside of us. I was excited to find that in this family were two girls about my age, full-blooded teenage girls! While this news excited me, I soon found that these girls would become lifelong friends.

One night after class, my friends and I, along with our dads, headed back to our campsites to share songs we had learned. While we laughed and played our dads built a fire, creating an inviting, almost magical atmosphere. It was as if I could see the notes jump from the fiddle and dance around the fireplace. The girls began playing a tune that immediately caught my attention. My eyes watched every note they pressed with their fingers, and my mind filled with sounds so beautiful, I was on the verge of tears. I stood in amazement as the bow hopped over the strings, tossing back and forth. The song ended and I immediately asked the name of it. The reply was "Red Bird". That song followed me throughout the rest of my fiddling career, helping me win contests and remaining a crowd favorite everywhere I played.

When you're from a small town and one person finds out you have a hidden talent, everyone eventually finds out. I was asked to play at parties, weddings, family

reunions, nursing homes, and even my friend's houses for their parents. You name it, I've played it. Though reluctant to play at all these events, I really didn't mind in the least. Music makes people happy, and there's nothing like seeing a face light up when they hear the "Tennessee Waltz".

A face I never minded seeing light up was my grandma's. Every Sunday would be a day spent at her home, fixing a good home-cooked meal. With amazing food and continuous laughter, a day at my grandma's was never boring, especially during the holiday season. During these extra-special occasions, I was always asked to bring my fiddle and play for everyone my grandma knew, literally everyone. She always wanted me to play "Red Bird" for all of her friends because it was simply her favorite song that I played. I'll never forget the look on her face and how happy she was when I played it for her.

This last holiday, Thanksgiving, was not so happy though. We had some close friends, who were musicians, spend the holiday with us. Even my aunt had come in this time, the first time anyone had seen her in probably five years. We were cooking up a storm in the kitchen, as always, when my brother walked in the door with my grandma trailing right behind. She had a picture in her hand, and immediately handed it to my mother telling her she wanted her to have it. I didn't really pay attention to what it was, though, and went on setting up the table.

The food was great as always. Following the meal, our guests and I started playing music in the family room for everyone, and of course my grandma asked us to play her favorite song. Later on that night, she and I talked about me coming and spending the night with her sometime soon. We promised each other it would happen, but something was unusual in the way my grandma walked away. She just looked toward the ground, went to the couch, and sat by herself as if she didn't feel good. I thought she was tired because it was a busy day; I only wish I could have really seen what was wrong.

The next night we received a phone call from my grandma. She told me she was at a friend's house and that her chest was hurting. Panicked, I told my parents right away. They immediately got in the car and rushed to the house while I stayed on the

phone trying to comfort her. She told me that she was going to the porch to sit and put the phone down.

I drove to the hospital not knowing how serious everything was. When I got out of the car, my brother came to me and held on to me for what seemed like forever crying. That was the last time I would ever speak to my grandma; I knew right then she had passed away.

When we got home that night; I looked at the picture my grandma had given my mom. I held in my hands a picture of a cardinal, a red cardinal that had hung in her house for many years. I don't know exactly why my grandma felt the need to give that picture to my mom, but I have a feeling she knew what was going to happen before anyone even noticed. The Thanksgiving night we were playing music, my mom told everybody about this red bird that kept trying to get in the window of our house. Every day it would knock repeatedly on the window trying to get in. I later learned of the old wives' tale that states "when a bird is trying to get in your house, someone close in your family will pass away." The pieces were all there, but I just couldn't see them.

A few days ago I was walking by myself, and a gust of wind shook a tree beside me. A red cardinal flew right in front of me, spreading its wings proudly and flying away high into the sky until I couldn't see it anymore. I know that when we lose someone we dearly love, we look for things that remind us of them, but I don't believe we're the only ones looking out for our loved ones.