

CHAPTER ONE

Mom And Dad

MY dad, Glen Travis Campbell, is originally from Billstown in Pike County, near Billstown, Arkansas. It is rural farming country, and at the time of his birth, on April 22, 1936, the county's population was less than 100 residents. Dad's family accounted for almost one in eight of those residents. He was one of 12 children, born to a sharecropper father of Scottish descent.

My grandfather Wes Campbell's relatives were originally from Scotland, then they moved to Ireland, and from there they came over to America. I recently did some investigating in Salt Lake City, Utah, where I went through a bunch of genealogy records, and I discovered a lot of information about my dad's family. I found Henry Campbell, and I also found dad listed there, Grandpa Wes, Dan, Jesse, and then back to Henry. I was able to trace five generations, all the way back to Ireland.

I went through all of the books listing all of the ships that came into Ellis Island, and there was only one Henry Campbell. I found the ship's manifest, and it listed all of the people who boarded that particular ship. I found that when Henry came over to the United States in the 1800s he was only 18 years old, so it fits into everything that I knew.

My grandfather Wes was married once before he married my Grandma Carrie, and he had two boys by his first marriage: Wayne and Lindell. Then he married my grandma, and together they had 10 children, including two sets of twins. Each of those kids had a lot of children of their own, so there are just a lot of Campbells running around in Billstown, Arkansas.

I have been to Billstown, and it is very small. When dad was living there the population was 311. It is literally a "don't close your eyes, or blink, or you'll miss it" kind of town, or a "you'd have to be going there to get

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there” type of place. There are two general stores there. All of the houses are small and really spread apart. As dad always says, “We lived so far out in the woods that nobody lived behind us.” Some of the most memorable years in my life came from spending time in Arkansas with my grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

My dad’s parents were both very down-to-earth people, like all the Campbells. They were just awesome, and I have so many fond memories of them. I got along great with them, and they were very much loved by everyone they met. They both lived into their eighties.

Dad knew from an early age that he had a love of music, and it was his Uncle Boo who originally taught him how to play the guitar. Young Glen Campbell immediately showed an instinctive talent for playing the instrument, and everyone in the family was aware of it. When he was a teenager, he went to Albuquerque, New Mexico, to live with his Uncle Dick Bills, who was married to dad’s Aunt Judy. Dick Bills was a professional musician at the time, so the opportunity of moving west to live with Uncle Dick and Aunt Judy seemed like a great way for dad to break into the music business world.

If this opportunity hadn’t come along when it did, who knows if dad would have ever gotten the opportunity to leave Billstown, or a chance to pursue his career in music?

When he moved to Albuquerque, dad immediately found himself playing guitar in his uncle’s established band: Dick Bills & The Sandia Mountain Boys. Not only did Dick Bills & The Sandia Mountain Boys perform at two local bars called the Hitching Post and the Chesterfield Club, but Uncle Dick also had a local radio show, and dad would appear on the radio program as well. For him it was an instant introduction to show business, and a golden opportunity for an 18-year-old boy.

It was in Albuquerque that my mother and father first met. My mom’s maiden name was Diane Kirk, and she was to become my dad’s first wife.

My maternal grandparents were Lucille and John Kirk. My grandfather we called “Dude” or “Grandpa Dude”. He had the first Indian trading post in New Mexico, which he owned with his siblings, the Kirk Brothers. He would trade things with the Indians, and he would sell hand-woven Indian blankets, pottery and jewelry to the public. I still have an authentic Indian blanket that my mother gave me that has “Kirk Brothers” on it.

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In fact, my grandfather's trading post was written up in the book *Route 66: The Romance Of The West*. That book is all about trading posts and other interesting spots along historic Route 66, and the Kirk Brothers Trading Post is in there. It was located in Gallup, New Mexico.

My grandmother Lucille was a homemaker, and I have wonderful memories of her. I also have some absolutely gorgeous photos of her as a young girl. She was definitely model material, and she was just a stunning looking woman. I just loved her.

My mother was one of seven children. There was John, Tommy, Jody, Venita, Diane, Jimmy, and Vinnie.

The Chesterfield Club was a popular nightclub in Albuquerque. My grandma and grandpa used to go there quite frequently to dance. My mom had seen my dad on *The Dick Bells Noontime Hour* and had mentioned it one day to my grandma. She said, "Isn't he handsome?"

Of course my grandma said, "Well they sometimes play at The Chesterfield Club. So one night we will take you and your sister Venita."

Now, even though the club was a 'nightclub' per se, I guess it was OK to take your kids there, as long as you were with your parents. It wasn't an actual restaurant, but they did serve some food also. So of course mom went, and dad saw her and asked her to dance.

According to my mom, he actually said, "Can I borrow your frame for this dance?" How is that for a funny expression?

Had it not been for the Chesterfield Club I might have not come along. As they say in the movies, "That's where Glen met Diane." At that time my mom was just 15 years old, and dad was 18. After that night they immediately started dating and went together for a year before breaking up. After a couple of months went by, my mom came home from school one day, and found my dad waiting for her.

They got back together, and a few months after that my mom got pregnant. At that time she was just a young girl in the tenth grade in high school. My grandmother Lucille was not happy with this to say the least, especially since her daughter was just a young girl of 16.

According to what mom told me, she and dad were married in a civil ceremony at the court house in Albuquerque. It was my grandfather – along with another witness – who was there with them. My grandmother refused to sign the marriage license and she would not go with them to the court house, since mom was underage.

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When dad and the rest of the band were out on the road, mom would usually stay with the steel guitar player's wife, as she was pregnant and 16, and too young to be alone. One night when she was seven months pregnant, she suddenly experienced severe labor pains and I believe mom said it was Marcie – the steel guitar player's wife – who took her to the hospital.

My grandfather went to the hospital and waited with mom while my little brother was born. He was born two months premature, and his lungs weren't fully developed. And of course back in those days they didn't have the technology they do today, to deal with those situations.

My grandparents would not let mom see the baby at all. They thought it would be too traumatic for a 16-year-old to see him, and for him to die in front of her. My brother had no real chance for survival.

Mom was at my grandparents at the time when the hospital call came in, announcing that the baby had died. My dad did not want to go to the hospital with my grandfather, and they got into a huge quarrel. Dad was apparently so mad, that he and my mom just left upset, and they went back to where they lived to grieve over this sad situation.

Although the baby died, and my mom never got to see him, she named him Glen Travis Campbell Jr. How sad it is to think that she never laid her eyes on the baby who would have been my older brother. He died within two weeks of his birth.

I had never heard the details about this whole story before, until recently. It was something that my mother had never spoken of in all of these years. Mom had tears in her eyes as she recounted all of this to me.

Maybe I would have had an older brother if they had known how to deal with premature births back then. This all took place in 1955. I was born a while later in 1956.

There are a couple of photos of my dad and me from back then. In photographs he was so young and handsome it is easy to see why mom fell in love with him.

I once asked mom, "Do you have any photographs of you and dad together when you were married?"

She said to me, "No. We really didn't take a lot of pictures back then." To this day, I hardly have any pictures of my mom, so I can surely attest to that fact. According to her, she never has needed photos to remind her of her life and where she has been.

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Mom told me that in addition to the Chesterfield Club, she also went to the Hitching Post as well, just to watch dad play after they were married. She also said that dad wouldn't let her dance with anyone other than the band members during the band's intermission.

She also told me that grandma used to make the shirts for the band. I do remember my grandma being quite the seamstress.

Personally, I remember nothing about any events from that era when my dad and my mom were together. I can look at what few photographs exist from those years back in Albuquerque to give me a vision of that time, but I was still too young to remember very much really specific from the fifties.

Mom and dad's marriage didn't last a long time at all. In fact, they decided to get divorced after just four years. Considering the duration of most teen marriages, they actually had quite a long relationship for kids that young. They basically decided that it wasn't going to last in the long run, so they started out with a "trial separation" of a year.

According to New Mexico law, a couple had to be separated for an entire year before the state would grant you a divorce. I think that the logic was that you might have a possible reconciliation if you didn't wait for a year. They gave people a 12 month chance to see if their relationship was going to work out or not.

From my perspective, it seemed to me that my mother and father always got along with each other, even though their marriage didn't last. Including the year they dated before they got married, their relationship was one that only went on for five years in total. They were divorced in 1959.

After my mother and father decided to split up, mom went to live with her sister and brother-in-law: my Aunt Venita and Uncle Joe Carmer. Meanwhile, dad met a woman by the name of Billie, and they began a relationship. He had met Billie in Albuquerque as well. By the time I reached my fourth birthday, my mom and dad were already living separate lives.

Even after they split up, they were still friendly with each other. I was talking to mom recently, and she said to me, "There were times when I was living with your aunt and uncle, after the divorce, that your dad still came over and visited us." I think that it would be fair to say that mom was still in love with dad, even though they were divorced.

In spite of any emotional ties that they still had for each other, or

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feelings that they harbored for each other, I really feel that they would have broken up eventually anyway. They had simply grown apart.

Dad had obviously expressed his show-business career desires to her. Even though he was just a local musician in Albuquerque, he had already told her that he wanted to at least take a shot at the big time, in a big city with more opportunities. If that is all that you want to do, you at least have to strive for the big trophy. Everybody wants to excel at what they do, and if you are playing a guitar, then that's going to eventually have a calling for you somewhere more sophisticated than New Mexico.

Mom was just never made for the kind of life that the wife of a musician has. She just wasn't. It is simply as plain as that.

My mom is someone who is totally without any pretense. She was a very fifties "homemaker" kind of mom. In fact, she was always the perfect homemaker. Mom would have cookies baked when I came home from school, dinner on the table every night, and that kind of simple and idyllic home life.

Mom has also always loved animals. I remember that at my grandmother's home, there were always lots of Siamese cats running around at the house. So, mom was raised loving animals. I think that she grew into being somewhat of a homebody because of this. She could never go anywhere for long periods of time, because there were always pets to take care of, and that was very important to her. She was the type of person who would never go on overnight trips anywhere, because there was always an animal – if not several animals – to take care of at home in the morning.

How could she ever be married to a man who was a musician, who regularly had out-of-town gigs? Her marriage to dad was never going to work out in the long run.

On the other hand, my relationship with my mother was always a close one. Since my mom was only 17 or 18 years old when she had me, we were very close in age. In a way, it was like we grew up together. Throughout my life, she was more like a friend to me than a mom.

Not long after he began his marriage to Billie, dad had already decided to move to Los Angeles. He loved to play the guitar, and there was only so far that he could go with a career in music in Albuquerque, so he decided that he had to move west to California if he was ever going to have a real shot at pursuing his dreams. Unlike my mother, Billie loved that idea.

My dad was always very different from my mom. In fact, they were

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exact opposites. Mom wanted to stay at home and take care of me, tend to the house, and care for her pets. Dad had a taste of what the life of a successful touring musician could be, and he longed for more. Dad always delighted in having the spotlight. He loved being onstage with other musicians, and he always felt happy and confident in a group setting as a musician having a great time making music and entertaining people along with his friends.

Looking back on this era, I truly feel that my parents would have divorced eventually, especially after dad became a big name in the music business, and in the whole show-business world. He was a talented and handsome young man who at least wanted to have his shot at the big time. Mom, on the other hand, isn't someone who could have, or would have, gotten into the dynamics of the music scene – let alone the Hollywood fast lane. That simply is not her lifestyle at all. They both had their own dream of what their lives should be like. Unfortunately, they were dreaming totally different dreams.