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Jackie and Roy
An American Story
Part 2

"We stayed in Milwaukee about six months," Roy continued. "Associated Booking was nice enough to advance us some money, and then they got us some jobs. The first one was in Canada, in Hull, Quebec. We did this, we did that. We went to California and played some jobs out there. We were carrying a governess with us and two kids with high chairs.

"We were gypsies."

"We had a buggy in the back seat of the car," Jackie said. "We used a sterilizer every night in the hotel to sterilize bottles, because in those days you couldn't buy the things they have today."

"We were coming back to Mr. Kelly's in Chicago," Roy said. Mr. Kelly's, in the Rush Street area of the Near North Side, was an exquisite presentation room owned by the Marienthal brothers, George and Oscar, who also owned the London House, a major room in the jazz circuit and an excellent restaurant. Mr. Kelly's was a perfect room for singers, with a good piano — Dick Marx was the house pianist — good sight lines and excellent sound system. Indeed, it was a joke in Chicago that Oscar Marienthal would introduce himself to incoming acts by saying, "How do you do? I'm Oscar Marienthal, and there are twenty speakers in the ceiling." Or ten or thirty or however many it was. But Oscar Marienthal was very proud of that sound system. He and his brother are gone; so are Mr. Kelly's and the London House, and we shall not see their like again.

"That's where we were headed, Mr. Kelly's," Roy said. "We stopped in Las Vegas to see a friend who was playing trumpet in one of the bands. And who do we run into but Don Palmer, Charlie Ventura's manager. He says, 'Hey! What are you doing?'

"I said, 'We're going to Mr. Kelly's in Chicago for two weeks.'

"He said, 'Wait a minute. One of my groups fell out. They're not going to open tonight at the Thunderbird. Fill in!'

"I said, 'Oh no. I don't even have a rhythm section.'

"He said, 'I'll get you a rhythm section. You open tonight!'

"We got a rhythm section, we rehearsed, we opened, it was very successful. They loved what we were doing and it was nice. When our two weeks were over and it was time to go to Mr. Kelly's, the people at the Thunderbird said, 'You can't leave.'

"I said, 'I've got a contract and I have to honor it.'

"They said, 'Okay, then you're coming right back here.'

"I said, 'Fine.'

"We went to Mr. Kelly's, and came back and stayed at the Thunderbird for about eleven months."

Jackie said, "That started a new thing for us, working the gambling circuit. Once we played the Thunderbird, we got work at different hotels. Each hotel had more or less its own clientele, so you could do that. We worked about a year at the Sands. We worked at the Dunes, then we went up to Reno and worked at Harrah's and the Wagon Wheel."

"We worked a great deal during the summer at Lake Tahoe," Roy said. "Took our kids with us. And one of my friends lent me his ski boat. We'd have a marvelous time, bippin' around, work San Francisco, then get back to Las Vegas and book another job for another year. We bought a house, lived there for four or five years. The kids were in school, great school system, and we had a marvelous time."

"I must say it was hard at first," Jackie said. "Because the audiences there couldn't care less about what we did. It was basically a gambling crowd. But we worked in the best lounges that existed at that time. At one time we were at the Sands, opposite Red Norvo and his group. And that was the hotel that had Frank Sinatra, Lena Horne, Sammy Davis, Nat King Cole, all the good acts. I met Nat Cole there. It was the one place that had some good music, so you did get a better clientele. Nevertheless, it was still a gambling place. But it taught me that you had to have a little bit more showmanship. I used to just stand there with my hands at my sides and just sing. I found that I had to get into it more. I don't do it much, but it makes you aware of it.

"I have noticed that the best work we do is where we're shown well and have good lighting. It all helps. It enhances what you're doing. It puts a lot of drama in it when you're singing a song that tries to tell a story.

"At first I didn't like working there. You didn't get the applause at the end, you didn't get the attention that you would in a jazz club. And so I'd go home feeling very depressed. But as we worked there, we learned to play to the audience more and finally we started to get a reaction. And more people who heard about our being there started coming in when they were in town. Especially opposite Red Norvo and his great group."

"Carl Fontana played with us at the Thunderbird," Roy said. "He also did concerts with us. We had Scotty LaFaro playing bass with us on concerts around the area. He was brilliant. He was playing roots and the tenths up above. Solos. Gorgeous. He knocked me out. Then he moved on to New York.

"We recorded a number of albums with Columbia. And then we got with Creed Taylor. The gem of the ocean."

"Look," I said, "you must get asked this question all the time. But how does a marriage survive when you are *always* together?"

Roy said, "This way, being together all the time, we have more time to argue." And they both laughed. "Well," he continued, "we like the same things. We like music, we are friends."

"We do everything together," Jackie said. "We even cook together. We sleep together, we walk together, we talk together. Everything is a sharing. I was an only child. I would never be in this business if I had to be alone on the road. I have to have a companion. And Roy is my companion, as well as my lover, my husband, my daddy, everything. We get along. We've had our rough periods. We went through a couple of years when we almost

broke up. But I guess that's the test of our having a strong relationship, because we got back together and it's been tighter than ever ever since."

"That was when we were working on the gambling circuit, Las Vegas, Reno, Lake Tahoe," Roy said. "We'd shoot out to San Francisco, then down to L.A., then back to Las Vegas. For eleven months straight we worked at the Thunderbird, at the Sands for nine months. Then we got into all the temptations of Las Vegas. Booze, broads, gambling. I'd be walking down a hall somewhere and one of the chorus girls would come by with her fur coat on, so there'd be no clothing marks when she'd go back onstage naked, and she'd go: Tah-dah!"

"Were you falling victim to this?"

Roy sighed, then said, 'Yes!" and then laughed.

"Yes, Father," Jackie said in a mock respectful voice, as if I were their confessor, laughing too. "Then there was a lot of tension, because we had to work such long hours. Like, our shift was generally from midnight till six in the morning. They wanted to get people into the lounges after the second show. We would do at least four or five sets, forty-five minutes to an hour long. I started to resent this. There isn't enough money to make you work that much, especially as a singer. My voice was starting to give me trouble. I began to become very lax about being on time, and that drove Roy crazy, because he's a very punctual person. He likes to be there early, and be set up and comfortable. And I felt they were taking advantage of us, and I felt, 'Oh, ten minutes late, fifteen minutes.' And that would get him crazy."

"But the management," Roy said, "would not complain to Jackie. I would get it."

Jackie said, "And I'd say, 'Tell 'em to come to me!' When I thought of it later, I wondered why I was doing it. And I think that was the reason. Because I resented that we were working that hard and not making that much money."

Roy said, "That was 1957, '58, '59, '60."

Jackie said, "The reason we settled there in the first place was that we had a chance to work in one place, and the kids were just of school age. We wanted to be with them. We didn't want to send them away to school or have someone else take care of them all the time. We wanted to raise them ourselves. So we stayed there and we made enough money to get a down payment for a house. We had a nice little place."

Roy said, "The hours were perfect. We'd finish at six in the morning. The desert sun is shining. It's beautiful. We'd get home, have some breakfast, get the kids to school, putter around, water the rose bushes, and then finally say, 'Wow, I'm tired.' Go to sleep, like ten thirty in the morning."

Jackie said, "Roy would get up and pick the kids up and bring them back. After they had dinner, they'd go to bed, and we'd lie down and take a nap. We slept in broken-up hours like that.

"And then one day, after being in Las Vegas for five years, Nickie came home from school and said, 'What's a stripper?'

"It started us to thinking: What future is there for them in Las Vegas? What influences will they have, growing up? It was a nice little hick town when you lived away from the strip, but I got thinking, This is too easily accessible to young kids."

Roy said, "We'd been working, and making money. We'd bought a house, we'd developed equity. But there's no future here. They call it the entertainment capital of the world. But nobody else *knows you're there.* We've disappeared for five years."

"We had just done an album for Columbia, with André Previn, called *Like Sing*, all André Previn material. That was produced by Irv Townsend. He got us together and suggested the idea. André kept saying, 'Why don't you come to California? They use a lot of singers on commercials and studio dates that you might be able to get in on. You could work out of L.A.'

"But at the same time, we were drawn to New York. Being from the midwest, we liked the East Coast a lot. To me, L.A. never seemed like a real city. We had memories of New York being exciting and wonderful and stimulating. We discussed it and finally decided to move to New York. That was in 1961."

Roy said, "We rented our house in Las Vegas to a bass player. We had a little trailer. We put our mops and our paintings and our brooms and our luggage in the trailer and the kids in the station wagon and we drove to New York City."

Jackie said, "We had no idea where we were going to live. But a very good friend of ours who had worked with Tony Bennett, a bass player named Don Payne, had written to us saying, 'If you ever want to come to New York, come to my house and use it as a base until you get situated.' When we got to New York, we stayed in a motel on the other side of the river before coming into New York. We phoned and said, 'We're here.' He said, 'Fine, come on over to my place tomorrow.'

"We got up, left the motel, and went to his place in Riverdale." For those unfamiliar with New York City, Riverdale is a lovely hilly and leafy section of the city just north of the island Manhattan. Now much of it is covered with red-brick apartment buildings, but in those days it was all single homes; some of it still is. It is on the east bank of the Hudson River, which is grand and regal at that point. Across the river the palisades of New Jersey rise steeply from the water.

Jackie continued: "We got the local paper and found a motel for several nights. We put the kids in school from a motel room, making sandwiches in our room. In the paper we found a house for rent in Riverdale that sounded too good to be true. Roy didn't even want to check it out. He said, 'It's too good, it's going to be too expensive.' The ad said *Private Drive. Use of swimming pool.*"

Roy said, "Five and a half acres overlooking the Hudson River. I said, 'Oh God, Jackie, I don't even want to see it. It'll break your heart.' Then we looked at some of the beehive apartments in New York, the honeycombs. Finally I said, "Let's take a look. What can it hurt?'"

They pulled up in front of an estate with two big sculptured

dogs at the driveway entrance. Jackie said, "This old Victorian house looked like a horror-movie house, scary. A Charles Addams Victorian house," Jackie said. "It was Elie Nadelman's house. He was a famous sculpture who died there twenty-five years before. You see his stuff at the Whitney Museum. We moved into this house after being investigated by their legal department, who accepted our children when they saw how well-behaved they were, and we got this place. Don Payne went over with us. It was only $300 a month! Seven rooms, with two bathrooms, kitchen, living room with shutters that closed and a little gas fireplace. Marble busts, wooden busts. Beautiful things. We're caressing these things."

Roy continued, "And the house is fifteen minutes from mid-town Manhattan, with a private driveway. I said, 'This is ridiculous.' Don said, 'If you don't take it, I'm going to.'

"We moved in. We were overjoyed. There was 300-year-old copper beech tree in the front yard. It cost a hundred fifty bucks to join the swimming pool across the driveway. We had a sledding hill.

"And we were in New York! We went back to Vegas in 1962 and sold the house we had, then came back to New York.

"Then a friend of mine, as we were about to leave for a job, said, 'Listen, I'd like to have you sing on a Halo shampoo commercial.' I said, 'We can't do it. We're leaving town.' He said, 'It will probably mean a lot of money to you. Delay it a day.' We did it, it was an easy thing, a bossa nova vocalese." He sang a fragment of it. "We leave town. We're in San Francisco. We start to get checks in the mail. We open up an envelope. There'd be seven checks. Nine hundred dollars. Seven hundred and fifty dollars. Five hundred dollars. I said, 'What *is* this? Here is more money than we make for singing in a club for a whole week, and it's all for the half hour we spent in the studio.'

"When we finally got back to New York, I set up a music production company. I started to go to meetings. I did Cheerios, Plymouth automobiles, Fritos, Borden's instant coffee, Dr Pepper. Those were the big ones. I'd do the creative work, read the story boards, write the music to fit it. Time everything. Hit all the highlights. We'd be in the studio for three or four hours every two weeks. The money was coming in beautifully. We'd take the kids to lunches at Voisin. We were having a party. We rented a house for the season out at Fire Island. Just having a great time. We were doing this for, what, about four years?"

"Yeah," Jackie said. "And it was the first time that we *ever* had the money and the time to enjoy New York City. We'd been there many times. Either we didn't have the money to do anything, or we didn't have the time because we were working. So this time we really had a chance. We took the kids to the theater. We saw many shows. We had dinners and lunches."

"We also did singing in commercials for other people. Then one day we finished in the studio and we were in the car on the way home and I said to Jackie, 'Hey, what did we just sing?' She said, 'Hmm. God, I can't remember it.' I said, 'This isn't very important stuff, is it?' She said, 'No.'"

"Boring," Jackie interjected.

"I said, 'Well, let's get a group and go on the road.' She said, 'Okay.' And we did."

"It's very seductive," Jackie said. "Because you start making that easy money, after you've worked so hard all your life, with traveling and all the rest of it. You get pulled in. Of course it was the answer for us for a while. When you're raising kids you've got to do something. But after four or five years of it, we said, 'Hey, let's not do it any more.'"

Roy said, "We'd made some money. We bought some real estate in California. We bought ITT, we bought Ford. I didn't know what we were doing at the time, but today, I'm so happy that it went that way. I was going to buy a new car for ten thousand. I said, 'Wait a minute. It'll only be problems, getting it fixed under warranty. Invest it in some stocks.' And it went up fifteen points and I said, 'Wow, if I'd bought the car, I'd have lost two thousand, this way I made four thousand.'

"It must have been around 1965 or '66 that we went back on the road."

Jackie said, "What started it back is that one day when we were out at Fire Island, we called Creed Taylor and said, 'We'd like to talk to you, Creed.' We came in from the beach. We said, 'We'd like to make an album. We haven't done anything for four or five years because we've been doing commercials.' We were all ready to give him a big sales talk, and he said, 'Okay.'

"As it turned out, he had something in mind too. He wanted Don Sebesky to write some charts for us. That's when we did the *Time and Love* album."

Roy said, 'For one of the tracks, Creed called Paul Desmond to play the solo on a composition called *Summer Song*. And here's Paul Desmond doing the solo, and it was perfect.'"

"There are a lot of other people on it," Jackie said. "Billy Cobham and Hubert Laws and Ron Carter and Bob James. It was fun! Working with strings! We had a seventy-piece orchestra. They did the tracks first and we overdubbed. I don't really like that."

Roy said, "Your ears are covered with the earphones and what you're hearing is coming back to you through the system. It tends to make you sing flat. We've learned to cover just one ear. Wearing earphones and recording in the studio is an alien feeling."

"An unnatural atmosphere," Jackie said. "You're recording with orchestra, and they goof, and you do more takes, and then it starts to get kind of tired."

Roy said, "And the good part of the song, the place where you had no trouble, all of a sudden a little chink falls out."

"It's the domino theory," Jackie said. "If you don't get a thing in the first takes, it's better to leave it and come back to it, I feel. But we did the album, one of the first things we did when we decided to get out of the jingles business. It got us back singing. And then we started to take some jobs."

"We traveled everywhere," Roy said. "I remember we went up for two weeks at the Colonial in Toronto. I've got to tell you about Oscar Peterson's piano! We get onstage at the Colonial, and here is this little five-foot grand piano that sounded like it was strung with rubber bands. We did opening night on it. And I remembered in the back of my head that Oscar said one time, 'Listen, if you're ever in town and need a piano, give me a call.' Bam! The light went on. I called all around and finally got him in Cleveland or Cincinnati or Kansas City or somewhere, and I said, 'Oscar, we opened at the Colonial last night and piano was terrible.' He said, 'Say no more. Just go to work tonight and don't worry about anything.' Went to work early. And that little crappy piano is on its side in the hallway and up on stage is Oscar's own Steinway B from the warehouse, set up, cleaned up, tuned, ready to go. It was gorgeous! I'll never forget it, and I'll always be grateful.' There was only one problem with it. For two weeks I played like Oscar Peterson!" He laughed.

"You *wish*," Jackie said.

"Yeah. I wish!"

"Then what?" I asked when the laughter subsided.

"Well, let's see. In 1971 we went to Europe. We were still living in the house in Riverdale. That year, Creed Taylor was sending a bunch of guys to Europe on a tour he was sponsoring. He said, 'Would you guys like to go?' Were we gonna say, 'No'? He had Hank Crawford, Stanley Turrentine, Freddy Hubbard, Jack DeJohnette, Ron Carter, Joe Farrell, Grover Washington. Come on! We'd never seen Europe, except London. We didn't really fit, we'd done this lush album with strings.

"The first concert we did was in Holland."

Roy groaned. Jackie said, "Roy doesn't want me to tell this, he doesn't like to talk about it, because it's painful to him."

"Go ahead," Roy said.

"When we came on and did our thing, we got booed by the audience. We did not fit!"

"It upset us," Roy said. "I know that at that point, I should have mooned the audience, but I forgot to. Bob James was playing piano, and we were doing one of Leonard Bernstein's things that was on our album. And the audience didn't want to hear that, they wanted to hear Stanley Turrentine."

"It stopped us for a moment. Bob James replayed the lead-in. Bless him for being such a professional. We continued on and we did the whole thing. And then it wasn't so bad. We did some vocalese and other things, and then it was all right."

"It was only a segment of the audience," Jackie said.

"But it hurt," Roy said.

"Well," I said, "I keep hearing about how marvelous European audiences are. But look at the behavior of British football fans." And I told them about an incident that happened at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. French jazz fans were notoriously unruly. Buddy de Franco was playing with the Oscar Peterson Trio. "The French felt that no white man could play jazz," said Norman Granz, who acted as announcer on his Jazz at the Philharmonic tours. The audience started whistling (an insult, not accolade, in Europe) and throwing coins at DeFranco. Oscar stopped the tune, and DeFranco left the stage. Granz got a chair, took it onstage, and sat down. "First of all," he said later, "I told them I wasn't going to speak French to them. And then I said, 'Okay, and I'll tell you something else. You paid me a certain amount of money for two hours of music. I already have your money in my pocket, and I'm not going to give it back. This concert ends at five o'clock. Whether you want to listen to this yelling or to music is up to you.'"

The audience grew quiet and the concert resumed. A friend later told Granz that it was the first time he had ever seen anyone get the best of a French audience.

"Airto came to our room that night," Jackie said. "He came and hung out with us. He said, 'Listen, I had this happen in Brazil,' and he told us all kinds of stories. He was very compassionate about it. Then we went to Germany, and the same thing happened from one segment of the audience."

Roy said, "Then it changed. I said, 'I'm not going to stand up and sing and have Bob James play piano. I'm gonna sit down and we're gonna do things like Clifford Brown's *Daahoud*. And we did this kind of stuff. At one point in Munich, there started to be a murmur in the audience. It was a ballad, and I guess they wanted to hear *Bam!*"

"It was in a big opera house during the Olympics," Jackie said.

Roy said, "This American Olympic wrestler stood up, a beautiful black man as wide as a house. Big muscular guy. He looked at the crowd and said, 'Shut up, motherfuckers, or I'll kill you.' Then everything was quiet, and we continued. It was lovely."

Jackie said, "Then we went to Toulon, in France. We had a concert up in the hills in this beautiful setting. George Wein said to the announcer, 'Why don't you go out and explain about Jack and Roy's history, where they come from? Nobody knows who they are.' Because we looked like a couple of college kids. I guess they thought we were too straight or something. So they did go out and gave some kind of speech. But some of the audience was still restless. And the same thing happened to Airto."

Roy said, "He came out, wearing bells on the pants, and doing a solo thing on the berimbau." The berimbau is a Brazilian, probably originally African, instrument consisting of a wooden bow attached at the bottom to a cut-away gourd, with a wire strung from the gourd to the top of the bow. In the hands of a skillful percussionist like Airto Moreira, when the wire is struck with a stick, an odd and unforgettable rhythm-in-pitch is produced. "They started to boo him," Roy said.

"He stopped," Jackie remembered. "He was irate. He told them off, and he calmed everybody down, and then they were a little bit more courteous. But they were restless and weird. It was a painful experience."

After that tour, Jackie and Roy moved to the house in Montclair, New Jersey, where they have lived ever since. It is a beautiful big Colonial home on a street of leafy big trees. On a really clear day, you can see the distant spires of Manhattan from that neighborhood. It was in this house that this conversation, or rather these conversations, for there were several of them over two or three days, occurred, most of them in their capacious bright kitchen, with coffee cups filled and, during the evening talks, ice-cubes rattling in Roy's and my highball glasses. I was staying with them for a few days. That small sojourn is one of my happy memories. "How did you find this place?" I asked.

"We had to get out of the house in Riverdale," Jackie said, "because they owner was coming back from Europe. We started looking around and found this house and moved to Montclair. That's when we had the experience with Nickie . . . . "

"You know," I said, "it's a subject I've avoided with you. For years. I never wanted to ask. But if you want to talk about it now, maybe it's time."

"Absolutely," Roy said. "Well." And he paused. "We were living out of suitcases. We had just moved in here. May 1, 1973. Weekend comes by and we're going to work at a new club. New club was opening. We're working opposite Ernie Calabria's marvelous group.

"We move into the house and there are suitcases open on the floor. We don't know where to put anything. Nothing's settled. And we have this weekend gig. Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. We do Friday night, and everything's terrific. We're overjoyed. We get home and get into bed and about five in the morning, six in the morning, the phone rings. I say, 'What is this?'

"And it's Marshall Mechanik's mother or father. He was Nickie's boyfriend. They were living together. And his mother, or his father, I can't remember, said that they had just heard from Jersey troopers that Marshall's automobile was in a wreck on the highway. They told her Nickie was in the car and she's in the hospital down in Tom's River. And we'd better get down there. "So we jumped up and got dressed, just praying, thinking Oh God, I hope she isn't injured too badly, and that nothing is broken. It took an hour and a half or two hours to drive down there.

"We get to the hospital, and we're *waiting*. And the doctor comes out finally, and he says, 'Sit down.' And he said, 'She just passed away, fifteen minutes ago.' I think I grabbed him, I'm not sure. He said, 'Take it easy, take it easy.' I said, 'No, no!' And he said, 'I'm terribly sorry, but she passed away fifteen minutes ago.'"

Jackie said, 'We wanted to see her. But he said, 'You wouldn't want to see her.' Later we heard that she had hit her head so hard that even some of her hair was still in the car. She must have had a terrible injury, and if I had seen that, I probably never would have forgotten it."

"And then we were asked where we wanted the body sent," Roy recalled. "Then and there we had to make arrangements. We were just dumbfounded. And we said, 'She wanted to be cremated.' And we arranged for that.

"Then we got back into the car. We were sobbing and crying."

Jackie said, 'I don't know how he drove."

"I think the car drove itself," Roy said. "We were just wiped out. We walked in the door and Dana said, 'How is she?' And how do you tell her?"

"She idolized Nickie," Jackie said. "Nickie was a month short of twenty and Dana was sixteen. And she just started crying and she ran up the stairs, inconsolable. We couldn't touch her. I wanted to hold her, and she just wouldn't have anything to do with it. She had a friend who had been here, staying overnight, which was a good thing. It was just dreadful. We just fell apart.

"Nickie was a singer. She wasn't working at it, but she was very good at it. She loved horses. She was on her way to the Monmouth race track, because she liked to walk the horses to cool them down. I think she had ideas of eventually having a horse and learning more about them. She had ridden a lot in Vegas. She was partners with a friend named Nina Bergman in their own business."

Roy said, "She and her partner the night before had just gotten a big order for chamois bikini bathing suits from some boutique. They were just overjoyed, and so they stayed up late, and she got up early, and didn't have enough sleep. And here she is, driving along. We went to see the road, a two-way road, just pine trees, narrow road, very boring. It just drones on and drones on. She fell asleep, went off the road and into a tree."

Jackie said, "She hadn't been driving more than two or three months. In fact, the last time we had seen her was when we went to the Felt Forum to see Eumir Deodato. And Nickie met us there with her boyfriend Marsh. She brought a big log as a gift for Roy. It had shells on it shaped like hearts that she found on the beach."

Roy said, "Dana just disappeared. We were sobbing, couldn't think. We did call a few friends. They came over and brought us food. We're supposed to go first. Not one of your kids."

"This was on May 5. We were still living out of suitcases. Then it was hard to even care about organizing. The third floor was going to be Nickie's place. Dana would have the guest bedroom, and we would have the master bedroom. Everything was all figured out. Well it was all wrong.

"So then we couldn't put a record on the turntable, because we couldn't stand to listen to music. We'd break out in crying again. I couldn't perform any music. We left the piano and all our stuff at the club, and eventually somebody packed it up and brought it to us. After a week or so, friends started coming by."

Jackie said, "Our best friends, Gerry and Sharon Freeman, who lived right here in town, would bring food over, all ready to eat, salad with the dressing already mixed. And one day they were driving by and they rang the doorbell. I went to the door. Sharon said, 'C'mere,' and we went out. There was a rainbow in the sky, and they wanted to make sure we saw it."

I said, "When was the next time you laughed?"

Jackie said, "I don't remember laughing at all."

Roy said, "Yeah. At some point something was said, and we had to laugh, and I think we were almost hysterical. In the meantime, I'd been digging in the mud in the yard, scraping the walls of the basement, anything I could do to keep my hands busy. Slowly we started to work through it and unpacked. We had to go and pick up her ashes. We did that. We had them here. We waited until one night of the full moon. I thought about her wishes."

Jackie said, "She used to run outside and howl like a wolf. She liked to be mischievous and devilish. And when there was a full moon she'd go outside and . . . " Jackie gave an eerily accurate imitation of a wolf's howl. "She'd make a lot of wolf noises at midnight. I used to say, 'Nickie, don't *do* that, the neighbors are going to think you're crazy.' She said, 'I just like to do it.'"

Roy said, "At the full moon, we went out to Fire Island, which was her favorite place. We took her boyfriend and her best friend and Dana. We walked along the beach to the point that reached furthest out to the ocean. And I said, 'Okay, everybody take a handful of these ashes and put them into the ocean.' That's what Nickie wanted. That's what we all did. There was some left, and I said, 'Marshall, you have to take the rest and dump them in.' And he waded out into the ocean, waste-deep in his clothes, and it wasn't warm at the end of May. And he took the ashes and threw them out into the air and a gust of wind blew some of them back on him, and he said, 'That's just like Nickie.'

"After we did this, I was going to read something Alec Wilder had written in his book *Letters I Never Mailed*."

Jackie said, "He called her Vicky in the book. It's about a little girl who came up to him and said, 'I'm all in pink.'"

"But I couldn't read it," Roy said. "I couldn't talk."

Jackie said, "Alec sent it to us and said, 'Please take this note out to the beach and bury it beneath a shell, with my love.' So we did that as Nickie's ashes were being put into the ocean."

Roy said, "Then we went back to the Freeman's beach house. We had a feast and wine . . . "

" . . . and a fire, and told stories about her," Jackie said. "That felt better. There's another thing. About a week after Nickie died, our drummer, who was very close to us, was killed. Under very mysterious circumstances. They thought he had been thrown off the top of a building. We suspected that after he left us, he'd gotten into dealing drugs."

"He came out to the house right after Nickie was killed, to console us. I'm sure he was dealing drugs. Something went wrong. He was beaten up and killed. He was buried in a closed coffin."

"Finally," Jackie said, "we talked to Creed. It was after quite a few months. He said, 'Look, the best thing you could do is go back to work. You're not going to pull yourself out of this unless you start doing something.' We said, 'Well maybe he's right. We won't be thinking about it all the time. And we've got Dana to think about. Thank God we've got her.'

"We had some songs we wanted to record, and Creed said, 'We'll do an album.' It turned out to be very strange, all original material, all our material. We made the mistake of giving it a title that was confusing. We called it *A Wilder Alias*. That was a song about our drummer who was doing things that weren't proper. And he'd started using different names. And everyone who bought this album thought it was going to be Alec Wilder's music. The first tune was an angry piece. There was a lot of anger and angst in that album because of what we'd been through."

"Claw music," Roy said.

Jackie said, "People put it on and said, 'What is *that*?' It sounded so harsh, but for us it was cathartic and Creed allowed us to do it."

Roy said, "Creed said, 'I want you to go into this club. And I'll get you a rhythm section." He got us Ron Carter on bass, Jack DeJohnette on drums, and a vibes player named Dave Friedman. So that was the group. We rehearsed. We played the Half Note, which was then on 56th Street. Later on we did a concert with that group at Carnegie Hall. And we were back into it."

"How do you handle it?" I said.

"You never get over it," Jackie said. "You carry a scar on your heart. Anything that happens that makes you identify with that date. I get a little sad on May 5, but I don't go boo-hoo. The crying wells up at funny times. One day I walked up and saw a pair of her boots in the closet, and you could almost see her feet, because of the way they were worn. And I fell down crying."

I said, "Do you think maybe we get more sensitive, rather than less sensitive, as we grow older? I find I want to cry more over movies or lyrics or things that happen to people now than when I was younger."

"Because you've been there," Jackie said. "And you get over being inhibited about showing emotion."

Jackie and Roy look far younger than their years. They have always exercised, and Roy still has a thirty-five-inch waist. They could retire entirely, if they wanted, but they remain active, at least to the extent that pleases them.

Jackie said, "Since we've progressed through the years, and got more respect in a lot of ways, we've been able to work nicer rooms. We've worked the Fairmont Venetian Room. I must say that the rooms that are the best are so wonderful to work in, and yet you don't get the audience you want, because it's only wealthy people who can go to those places. And so your audience is restricted. You really have the most fun when you work some little dive, some little joint, they're the places where you usually have the best time. And yet you don't really like to work there, because it's smoky, and you die, and you get these allergies. They're not healthy. But they're more fun. And even when you work in a concert hall — I love working in Carnegie Hall or something like that — it's not as great as working in a smaller, more intimate setting, for what we do."

Roy said, "Cate's in Washington was maybe the best jazz club in the United States. The best-looking, the best decor, best food,

Jackie and Roy 1991 John Reeves Photo

best piano, best sound system. It's gone."

Jackie said, "There was one in San Francisco for a couple of years, called the Plush Room, in the York Hotel. We loved that room. But it folded. They couldn't find enough acts that would draw people in there. Now it's going again.

"We now find that people who were fans of ours come in and bring their kids, who are now married. And they say, 'Hey, we were raised on your records. We loved your music and we love it now.' That happens in a lot of cities.

"We're working with little labels now, who will let us do what we want to do. But the small companies do not have the distribution. People say: 'They don't have their record at Tower.'"

It is the dilemma of all quality music.

Irene Kral moved to Los Angeles in the mid-1960s. She married trumpeter Joe Burnett, lived in Tarzana, and had two daughters. For a time she languished in obscurity, then made a series of albums with Alan Broadbent. One of them — recorded live in a performance on September 11, 1977, for the Bach Dancing and Dynamite Society at Half Moon Bay, California, which is about thirty minutes' drive south of San Francisco — has just been released on the Just Jazz label. Although the sound has a somewhat cavernous quality, the record will confirm to her admirers that she was every bit as good — with her rich, rather dark, voice and keen intonation and largely unadorned approach — as we all thought. She had less than a year to live.

In the mid-1970s she began to get the recognition she deserved. Then she discovered that she had breast cancer. I remember visiting her during that time. She remained uncannily optimistic, and whatever fears she felt, she never put her burden on anyone. She died on August 15, 1978. Thus Roy and Jackie lost their daughter, and Roy lost the sister whom Jackie saw as her own sister, within five years. Irene was forty-six.

One of Irene's daughters, Jodi Burnett, is a cellist. A rather sweet coincidence has occurred. Clint Eastwood uses records by Johnny Hartman in the sound track of *The Bridges of Madison County*, giving Johnny a degree of recognition he rarely got when he was alive. Eastwood also uses some of Irene's work in the film. Jodi is in the orchestra playing the underscore of that film. Thus she and her mother, seventeen years after Irene's death, are in the soundtrack of the same picture.

Jackie's mother and stepfather are still alive. She and Roy went out to Milwaukee to visit them recently. They got caught in Newark Airport in the blizzard of 96, then caught in a Milwaukee airport fog as they tried to return to New Jersey. It was a long journey home. I was talking to them on the phone a few days later. As you may have noticed, you don't talk to one without the other. Their paragraphs flow together as smoothly as their music. One of them will begin a thought and the other will complete it.

"How would you want to be remembered?" I said.

"One thing I want," Roy said, laughing. "I want to be mentioned as an accompanist."

Jackie said, "And I'd like to be mentioned as a soloist! Because we're a duo, and that's the unique thing about what we do. And that's all they talk about or think about."

And that's how they undoubtedly will be remembered, as a remarkable vocal duo, unique in American musical history, the serene, flawless and exquisite blend of two voices lofting the melodies they have chosen, giving them a new character.

There are, I suppose, no perfect marriages. But theirs comes as close as one is likely to find. Unique among the people I know, Jackie and Roy have lived the story in the songs they sing.

And Czech, German, Polish, Irish, English, midwest, it is an American story.

Jeru

In late October and early November, I went on a jazz cruise of the Caribbean aboard the S.S. Norway. I will always be grateful that I did. For it was to be the last time I saw Gerry Mulligan, although we talked on the phone a number of times after that, including a New Year's Eve call I'll tell you about.

I had been hearing rumors for months that Gerry's health was failing rapidly. Bobby Rosengarten, his neighbor in Connecticut, told me that Gerry was undergoing chemotherapy in Boston. Gerry would tell me it was for treatment of a liver condition consequent of a case of hepatitis years ago. He said he only felt bad after the treatments. I know of only one thing that chemotherapy is used for.

Phil Woods was on the cruise, performing in the same week as Gerry's group. Phil and Gerry had had their collisions, both of them being very crusty Irishmen. Gerry once hired and fired Phil on the same evening, and at one point he called Phil an Irish

drunk, which infuriated Phil at the time. As Phil said to me on the ship, "Talk about the pot calling the kettle green!" (In recent years, neither of them drank anything at all.) They reconciled, of course, and Phil is on the 1992 *Re-birth of the Cool* album Gerry did. Phil also said on the ship: "I love Gerry."

Johnny Mandel came along as a passenger, just to hang with his friends, and the week developed into that, a hangout of Mandel, Phil, Gerry, and me. But Gerry was very weak. His redblond hair long ago had turned paper white. But his skin now had a transparent look: the veins in his hands stood out quite blue. And he was in a wheelchair much of the time, using a cane the rest of it.

There is a theater on that ship that I don't particularly like. It gives me what Woody used to call the clausters. But I could not miss Gerry's performance there. He hobbled onstage and sat on a stool. And the quartet began to play. It was one of the finest groups Gerry ever led. And it was some of the finest and most inventive playing I ever heard from Gerry in the 36 years of our friendship, not to mention the years long before we met, when his LPs were high on the list of my favorite records.

The rapport of the group was amazing, particularly Gerry's telepathic communication with the outstanding pianist Ted Rosenthal. I was in awe of what I heard. It had a compositional integrity beyond anything I have ever heard in jazz. From anyone. I do not know what was going on in Gerry's mind, perhaps the atmospheric awareness of his mortality. It is not that his playing was abandoned, although it certainly was free. It was as if he had a total control of it that he had been seeking all his life. There was one piece that he played in which the byplay with Rosenthal left me with my jaw hanging down. I don't even know its name; one of Gerry's pieces. For certainly he was one of the greatest composers in the history of jazz, as well as its primary baritone soloist. Yes, I have known other baritone players who soloed well; but none of them had Gerry's immense compositional knowledge and instinct. So exquisite was the structure of what he, and bassist Dean Johnson (an astounding player, usually with Jackie and Roy) and drummer Ron Vincent did that, afterwards, I told him, "Gerry, I am not sure that this should any longer be called jazz. It seems to be some kind of new end-of-the-century improvised classical music." Franca Rota, his wife, told me later that he quoted that.

There were to be two performances by the group that evening. Leaving the theater, I ran into Phil Woods and Johnny Mandel. Both of them felt as I did: they couldn't endure a second performance. Such was the tearing of emotions in two directions: ecstasy at the level of Gerry's music and agony at the frailty of his health. Next day he asked us all to come by his room. And we went up to the top deck. Gerry was never enamored of the sun: with his blond, now white, eyelashes, its glare bothered him. But we went up, and I took a camera. Franca, who was a professional photographer in Italy when they met, photographed the four of us. There were days in the 1960s when you could have found the four of us together in Jim and Andy's in New York. (Jim and Andy's is long since gone. A year ago, Gerry wrote a letter to his old friend and sometime record producer Jack Tracy, editor of *Down Beat* before I was and for the last 25 years a non-drinker, in which he said, "What we need at this point is a non-alcoholic Jim and Andy's.) Mandel and Gerry had been friends since they were habitués of the Gil Evans pad on West 55th Street in the late 1940s. As Franca took the pictures, I think we were thinking the same thing, that the four of us would never be together again.

On New Year's Eve, Gerry called. He told me how much he loved a lyric I had written for one of his tunes, *I Hear the Shadows Dancing*. "It makes me cry," he said. But then he became cheerful and said he was feeling well and lectured me a little about taking care of my own health. I had the ominous feeling afterwards that it was a farewell call. Bill Holman, whom he called in mid-January, got the same feeling, and so did Johnny Mandel, whom he phoned around the tenth. Gerry knew. But like Irene Kral, he just wasn't going to lay it on the rest of us.

Franca called me on the morning of Saturday, January 20. I said, "How are you?" She said, "I'm fine," she said, and I said, "How's Gerry?" And she said, "Gerry's dead." It was like a body blow, although I could recall all the auguries of the past months.

Franca talked for a long time. She said, "Gerry always spoke of you as his brother. He'd say, 'I've got to talk to Gene about this, he'll know what I mean.'" Hearing that only made it worse.

Gerry had done a concert in Italy for the Dalai Lama of Tibet. In his last days, Gerry couldn't speak. The Dalai Lama telephoned him. Franca held the telephone close to his ear. The Dalai Lama told him what a good man he was. Which is true. He could be feisty, but he was a fine man, and God knows a brilliant one, one of the most gifted musicians this country ever produced, not to mention one of the most influential.

When I was very young, I used to cheat at the game of Snakes and Ladders. My grandfather said he'd cure me of it. He'd let me win and win and win until, knowing I hadn't really won, I'd grow bored. And it worked. I am incapable of the cheating by which some men get to the top, maybe because of my grandfather. Trash like movie mogul David Begelman, who lied and cheated and embezzled his way to the top, one of those marauders who suppressed and destroyed great art in America, are high on my contempt list, although that is beyond the bourn of their solipsistic vision. Begelman ended up broke, minor punishment for the damage he did to America and its arts. When he blew his brains out at 72, I felt no pity for him. He was a bad man who hurt us all. I couldn't play by his rules, or lack of them. There's no skill in that, and therefore no achievement.

Gerry felt as I do. He said to Franca, "A life without ethics is meaningless."

There are those who improve the world by leaving it, and those who diminish it by their departure. Gerry was one of the latter.

The world has lost a great musician. I've lost one of my best friends.