

## The Song

By Michele Venne

The first time I heard “Touch of Gray”, by the Grateful Dead, I was sitting in the backseat of a '67 Cadillac on a second date with a man I would spend the next eleven years with, as we were leaving a Warren Zevon concert at the now burned down Rockin' Horse Saloon in Scottsdale, Arizona.

The owner and driver of the Caddy was one of the guitar players for the band my boyfriend was a member of at the time. The front passenger was the other guitar player, along with my boyfriend, the bass player-who also operated the drum machine that they nicknamed “Ringo”-that constituted the band The Dark. The Caddy was a pale green with an off-white interior, and the fabric over the roof that didn't stand a chance in the Arizona sunshine had given up some of its hold on the metal beneath it. The backseat was the size of a double bed, and I wondered if Grateful Joe, so named because he loved the Dead, had ever used it as such.

Joe was about ten years older than me, tall, with a Beatles haircut. He played lead guitar only because he could replicate any song, note for note, but improvisation was out of his realm. Patrick, who alternated with Joe on guitar parts, was loose and free with his playing, often branching out and behaving a bit like Neil Young, therefore having to be herded back to the melody and the rest of the group by Joe and my boyfriend. Perhaps Patrick expressed himself through his music since his overbearing wife allowed little variation from her daily routine. My boyfriend called himself a “jack-of-all-trades, and master of none”. He played rhythm guitar, bass, mandolin, harmonica, and keyboards. Securing gigs on his own, he considered himself an entertainer rather than a singer. In his younger days he played drums, and practiced imitating John Bonham and Ginger Baker. As he gained in age and experience, he decided that an amp and a guitar case, or a keyboard and stand, were easier to haul (since he had to be his own roadie) than a full drum kit.

I was only twenty-six at the time, and had just embarked on what was to be my musical education in the hands of people who had lived and breathed during the greatest revolution in history. I would return time and again to Jerry Garcia's words of, “Every silver lining has a touch of gray”, and “I will get by, I will survive”.