

This is a fifty year record of the creative and spiritual development of the author. It is the life story of a first-born 'baby boomer' nurtured in an honest, working class family and his relentless quest to improve his understanding and search for enlightenment. It is a journey that formed the core of his character. He believes his tribulations and triumphs will resonate with and contribute to the dialog and musings of his generation.

### **For Love...and Other Considerations**

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# *For Love...*

and Other Considerations



C.J. Gilmore

For Love and Other Considerations  
A Memoir

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ISBN 978-1-4507-4955-8

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Printed in the United States of America.

First Edition

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## ***The Piano***

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I could see the red brick building with its small windows sitting in the middle of a gravel lot surrounded by a chain link fence. She held my hand tightly and struggled to drag me along the sidewalk. I could also see several prisoners walking aimlessly in the yard behind the fence and before I could pull myself free, I was suddenly walking through a hole in the fence and toward the ugliest building I had ever seen. I was taken into the building and introduced to a very large old man who assured my mother that I would be fine once I got used to the place. She handed him an envelope and told him I was a little young but that I needed to get started. She then told me to be good and go with the old man. He took my hand and with a firm grip told me to say goodbye.

Goodbye? What? Before I knew it she was gone and I was taken to a small room and made to wait on a bench. I sat there feeling abandoned and betrayed and wondering what I had done.

There were bars over the wired glass window and I started to shake with fear. I had to get out of this place but I couldn't open the door. It was too heavy and the handle was too high. So I hid in the corner next to the door hoping someone would open it and when they did, I would make my escape to freedom. The door suddenly opened and a woman in a white dress looked straight down at me. Caught again. She took me by the hand to another room where she inserted a needle in my arm. She said she was a nurse and had to check me over before I could leave. I was told to take off my clothes except for my underpants. She then poked and prodded me and stuck things in my ears and a stick of wood in my mouth. She seemed pleased that I didn't have lice and I wondered what that was but was afraid to ask. When she was finished, she told me to get dressed and follow her to the big room. Once we were in the hall I made a break for it but she hollered to an accomplice to catch me and bring me back. Hand grabbing all over again.

I was ordered not to try that again and told to behave myself. With that instruction, I was thrust into a large room. The nurse told the lady in charge my name and to keep an eye on me and then she left. I looked around the room and saw several inmates sitting cross-legged on the floor. There were some low tables and small chairs in the room but they were not being used. When I was told to sit on the floor and cross my legs in front of me I assumed it was a form of punishment. I wondered what the others had done that they too were being punished. They were sitting in a double circle at one end of the room and I took a place behind them. Right behind me in the corner by the window stood a big black piano with fat

legs and from my position it looked like a great place to hide. I headed directly for it and positioned myself almost under it.

The lady stood in front of us and was writing something on the wall and talking at the same time. I started counting all the heads in front of me. There were too many to count. I didn't want to be there so I used my hands to shuffle backwards until I was completely under the piano. It felt safe. I had noticed that grown-ups had a difficult time reaching or crawling under things to get what they wanted whereas this was a specialty of mine. I was able to see and hear everything without being interfered with by others. I was already good at observing and taking in the details and retaining them for future use. That's what you do when you're unsure or shy – you just collect.

For awhile, I enjoyed the shelter and the anonymity provided by the piano but eventually I was discovered and told to come out from under it. This reminded all the other kids of my presence and led to an unexpected verbal assault by many of them – a mixture of name calling and snickering. I was surprised by this considering we were all prisoners.

The door opened and a man walked in with the sound of glass bottles jangling in a wire basket. They were little bottles of milk. The lady thanked him and advised that we were taking a break. She then began distributing them. I emerged from under the piano to get one but when she got to me she told me that I wasn't in the program. I was thirsty and wondered what I had to do to get into the program. Maybe I had to become one of those kids that pretended to be having a good time and not cause any trouble. After the milk moment we were ordered to be quiet and have a short nap. I slid back under the piano, and faced the wall in order to hide the tears that were making my shirt sleeve wet. I silently promised myself that I would be good and hoped my mother would change her mind and come and take me back home...and give me a glass of milk.

After our naptime, which I never used for that purpose, we were seated on the floor in a large circle and listened to a story being told by the jailer. She was very pretty and I figured that she was chosen on purpose for her pleasant manner and good looks so we would be seduced into compliance and do what we were told.

Later, we arranged all the chairs in a straight line and played a game to a piece of music the jailer played on the piano. We were told to walk around the chairs and whenever the music stopped to quickly find a chair and sit down. The idea conveyed was to compete for the available chairs by taking possession of one of them by sitting down on it. Apparently,

there was one less chair than the number of people playing the game right at the outset.

When the music stopped for the first time, everyone jostled each other to get one of the chairs and sit down on it. When the motion stopped there was one person left standing. He was told to go and stand by the black-board wall. Everyone was then told to stand up and one of the chairs was then given to the fellow who had just been eliminated from the game.

I don't remember at what point I was eliminated from the game but each sequence in which I participated, I did my best to walk slowly in the hope of being out sooner than later.

Those that were out already had the opportunity to sit down and rest and no longer had to compete for the momentary privilege of those still in the game. This was repeated over and over until there were just two people and one chair left in play. One girl and one boy. The girl didn't even try to sit on the chair. She just stood still while the music played and let the boy run around her and the chair. He sat down when it stopped.

She knew what I suspected, why rush for a chair if you were going to get one as soon as the others had finished playing this peculiar game?

The boy was announced as the winner to the rest of the group. There was no prize and he had no chair, so what had he won? If the purpose of the game was to encourage participation with others, why was it founded on competition instead of cooperation?

I don't remember how I got out of that place.

I remember my mother calling me for supper. I had been napping in my room.

During dinner she asked "how did you like your first day of school?"

I had been sitting there thinking I had a horrible dream while I was napping. Imagine my surprise in the realization that it wasn't a dream and there was much more of the same to come.

I told her I didn't want to go back but she explained that I had to go every day from now on.

Such was my introduction to formal education. I still wish I had been better prepared for that first day. Somehow in all the preplanning that must have occurred for that day, my mother had failed to inform me of the reality of the larger world and the journey I was about to embark upon.

For the rest of that school year I would take up residence under the piano. I loved the sound it made above my head and the shelter both it and the music provided. It was a great place from which to observe others, often undetected, and to dream of the freedom the end of day gave me.



It was a year of silence in school for me where I only absorbed the offerings without comment.

I do remember being told about going to school but my image was one where my mother was going to be the one who took me there and continued to be my teacher.

I never thought she would leave that important process to strangers.

At four years old your perspective is rather limited.

***For me, it was the beginning of the end of something I had given freely until that day. I would no longer have unconditional trust in adults and would always question those in authority.***

## ***The Waitress***

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It didn't start out to be an atypical night. What was typical was the slushy slick sidewalk of an icy cold November evening with a frigid wind off the lake propelling me forward. My black rubber boots had only thin gray wool socks separating my frozen feet from the elements. It was my luck, as the oldest of six children to go to the store and get that one item that always seemed to be missing for the bagged lunches needed for us rug rats to take to school. But this time I had to fetch the sandwich maker from the corner café where she worked as a waitress. She had been called in for a dinner shift and didn't like to walk home alone in the dark. I was only twelve but I had somehow convinced her that I was her centurion and could protect her from whatever we imagined was lurking in the dark. Besides, there was always an offer of some treat when I arrived which I always made sure was a few minutes prior to the end of her work.

The café was on the corner of our street and when I reached the alley at the rear I saw a flicker of light in the dark. I approached quietly and saw her. She was sitting on a milk crate with a plate of food placed on another in front of her. In her left hand was a Black Cat cigarette and some coins. She was counting them with her right index finger. The street lamp above the dumpster illuminated her just enough for me to see the worry in her face.

What was she thinking? How can you sit outside in frigid weather and consume dinner?

I stood there for a long time without her knowing and watched her sadness. For the first time in my life I saw her as a person. I saw how afraid and small she seemed sitting there in her worried state. I waited until she got up and went through the back door before walking to the front entrance. It was a very long way from the dim light above the dumpster to the inviting neon brightness of the sign in the front window.

I entered and stood near the cash register where the owner was counting the day's receipts. We nodded but never spoke. The café was a long counter with a dozen or more stools in a straight line along one wall with an aisle that bordered booths along the window on the other. Altogether there were seats for forty or fifty customers. That night, no one was sitting in the booths.

Five customers were sitting at the counter. The waitress entered from the back and grabbed a full pot of coffee. She quickly poured some into the first customer's cup, an older man who smiled and thanked her. She smiled in return as she passed back his cup. The next person asked for some pie and the waitress told her 'yes' it was freshly made today. They continued

for a moment in conversation as though they were old friends and laughed at something they both found funny. The third person had fallen asleep and she very gently touched his hand and whispered something in his ear. He awoke and shrugged and said he had worked a twelve-hour shift and was sorry he had fallen asleep. She replied, "I know what you mean ...I know how bone tired feels". He too accepted a cup of coffee as a warmer for the road ahead.

By this time she saw me, gave a little wave and silently asked me if I wanted a soda or something. I was always hoping for hot chocolate. It was too cold for soda and she thought I was too young for coffee but she offered some hot tea. I nodded yes to the tea.

She continued to serve the next customer by fixing him a sandwich to go. He expressed his gratitude by giving her a tip and telling her she was the best waitress and wished she worked more often during the dinner hour. She thanked him with a beautiful smile.

The last customer required nothing, said goodnight and left.

The waitress brought me the tea and a wedge of lemon explaining that the lemon was good for the tea and the cold. She said she needed ten minutes to finish up her 'side work' duties and then we could go. She pushed my hair back (it has always fallen forward on my face) and returned to her customers. I watched her closely trying to figure out how she could be the sad person I saw in the alley one moment and this other happy person in the restaurant. It was as though she knew how to be a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a mentor and a server all at the same time.

I was amazed by this view and perplexed by it.

The owner of the restaurant offered me a nickel if I wanted to sweep up in the kitchen and under the tables. I finished the tea, went with him to retrieve the dustpan and broom. I was surprised by how small the kitchen was and how everything was old and worn. I hung up my coat and decided to make the floor as clean as humanly possible. A few minutes later the waitress was ready and we bid farewell to the owner and left.

It seemed even colder outside and we hugged each other as we walked.

"You're unusually quiet tonight – are you okay?"

I took a few steps before I asked one of the two questions that had been racing in my head for the past half hour.

"How come you don't eat your dinner where the customers eat?"

"That's for the customers – we have a place in the back"

I now knew what that meant – inside and outside.

"For example", she continued, " Everything costs money in a restaurant and is paid for by the customers. That is why the tables and chairs are

for them. Another example is the food. I know you would love to have a hot chocolate on nights like this but milk and chocolate are more expensive than water and a tea bag and that is why it is a treat.

“You mean you have to pay for hot chocolate but the tea is free?”

“Yes, but not as much as the customers.”

“Speaking of customers do you remember the customer that left when you first came in tonight?”

“Yes”

“Well he didn’t pay for his food and that will be deducted from my pay.”

“Why?”

“Because it is part of my job to make sure that every check I write is paid. When you work for someone you have a responsibility to protect the business.”

“Does it happen often – people not paying for the food?”

“Sometimes – sometimes they just don’t have any money and need to eat. Every once in a while someone will come back when they have money and pay me. Serving people can be hard at times and every day is different. The important thing is to treat everyone the same and give them the best every time no matter what.”

My second question was the most important.

“I’ve been wondering – if your job is to serve people, who serves you?”

She placed her open hand on top of my head and gently massaged my hair.

“I’m not sure. Maybe it’s you honey, maybe it’s you.”

We spoke no further that night. I placed the nickel in her coat pocket.

I went to bed and lay awake for hours thinking about what I had seen and heard.

It was a night of tears and fears for the waitress and even more for my mother.

***I didn’t know then what I know now - that night was the realization that her service was a profession. I would later design many restaurants - none designed by me would forget to make sure that the staff would enjoy the same physical benefits as those enjoyed by the customers.***

## ***The Glass Window***

---

There are rare moments that truly take your breath away. Sometimes it's an extraordinary view of something never seen before. Sometimes it's a feeling that overwhelms all of your other senses. Sometimes it's both, which is rarer still. Your eyes are glued open and focused, while your conscious brain goes into overdrive trying to understand the significance of what the unconscious mind has already analyzed and determined significant. You remain motionless.

It is not a time for movement or speech. In fact you're incapable of either.

This part is the first time in this book that I want to direct my remarks to the person reading this vignette. This section is for you, whoever you are or imagine yourself to be. I want you to think about a moment in your life, perhaps like the one above, where you were filled to the brim with awe, or a euphoric moment of unmatched excellence, or love. Now add a moment when you were so in love you would have given one of your own kidneys to save a loved one's life because that's how important that person was to your own. Try to imagine not doing everything within your power to affect the best possible outcome for someone you love. Could you live with the knowledge that you didn't bring your best to the situation? Think about it. Isn't the answer no?

Have you ever felt fear with every fiber of your being when confronted with tumultuous odds? Try to remember the pain of your greatest loss and compare that to the rapture you felt the first time you fell in love. Can you remember the tears over the loss and the surrender you felt when someone captured your heart? Do you feel that intensity every time you are reminded about it by some event or simply just remember to think about it? Take a moment and think about it.

None of us escape our feelings. They make life precious and worthwhile. But, make no mistake about it, they hold us accountable forever and should never be underestimated in the young.

I want you to understand what I felt when I met my son, standing in a sterile hallway at 7:00 in the morning, a mere thirty-seven minutes after his birth. I was nineteen years old at the time.

A nurse approached Lynne's father to let him know he could see his grandson. She had just started her day shift and was unaware of my connection. She knew that Lynne was an unwed mother under the custody and care of her father. I was not invited to the viewing; I simply followed them down the hall to a nursery room with a large observation window. By the time we arrived there, Lynne's father realized I had followed them.

When the nurse asked me who I was, he answered that I was the one who had impregnated his daughter. I told the nurse, "I'm the baby's father." She said, "Oh." and then offered to show him the baby behind a closed curtain in a separate area of the room. The nurse had no intention of accommodating or talking to me.

It was clear by her reaction that unwed fathers were written off and out of the process at that time, viewed as pariahs who couldn't control their sexual urges and deserved no audience or recognition other than a moment to provide their clinical history for the record. I was the invisible man with no rights whatsoever. Teenage pregnancies were seen as immoral and shameful. Something to be denied the light of day, just as Mr. B. was doing to spare himself the humiliation of a public exposure that his unmarried daughter was pregnant and having a baby. That was his unwavering position, and he rigidly enforced his authority as Lynne's father.

To his credit he advised the nurse that I could see the boy for a couple of minutes. She and I walked alone a little further down the hall and she asked me to wait in front of a large window that was covered by drapes. A minute or so later the curtains opened to reveal four newborns wrapped in diapers in clear baskets. I quickly scanned the four baskets and knew he was the one in the third. She pushed that cart holding him toward me until the basket touched the other side of the glass. She didn't pick him up to bring him closer. She walked to the corner of the room. I have always remembered the look of disgust for me on her face.

I pressed my face to the glass window and took in every detail. I was less than two feet from him and could see every movement he made. He yawned and twisted from side to side and stretched his arms. He was absolutely beautiful. He looked like us. I could see a small tuft of hair with a hairline similar to my own. He had the shape of his mother's eyes. I desperately wanted to hold him in my arms to feel him moving and to smell his skin. I wondered if he would taste as good as he looked if I kissed him. The lights began to dim and I could sense the curtain closing with my peripheral vision but I continued to look at him with my forehead pressed against the glass until the curtains were closed. It felt cruel to only see him and not be able to touch him.

When the curtain closed, only three minutes had elapsed. Only one hundred and eighty seconds to photograph my son with my eyes and imprint as much detail as I could.

During the night Lynne's father had made me feel we were on a road of no return, or more to the point of no return – he told me the baby would be taken into custody at birth and become the 'property' of the Children's

Aid Society until someone was selected to adopt him. There didn't seem to be any possibility of stopping the process.

He hadn't bothered to look at his grandson; I could see him standing a distance behind me reflected in the glass. When the curtain closed he approached me and said these exact words, "Well I guess you're a father now, but I wouldn't be telling anyone about it. It's better if you just forget it ever happened." That was all he said to me and then he walked away. When Mr. B. told me to keep my father status to myself, I felt insulted. I didn't need to be told to be prudent and discreet. My own brothers didn't know at that moment, nor did anyone else that we were about to be parents. But the greater insult was when he told me to forget it like it never mattered to me. I knew he didn't really understand us at all nor was he concerned with anyone beyond himself.

I stood in that hallway for several minutes hoping I could make a plea to see my son one more time and maybe get to touch him. But no one emerged for half an hour. Eventually, the curtain opened and I got very excited but it lasted only a few seconds. There was a janitorial person doing some maintenance and all the babies were gone. I went back to the nurse's station to see where they had gone. The same nurse told me that viewing time was over. When I asked about another viewing time, she told me there were no more for the baby I had seen because it was already being prepared for transport. When I asked her where, she said, "That's really none of your business sir", and began to walk away. I called out 'nurse' very loudly and said, "Just for the record, that baby is loved. Adoption is being forced on us." She returned to me and said, "I hope the best for all three of you." By the rules in play, her first remark was correct; by mine she was absolutely wrong! She struck me as heartless but I realized she had a terrible job watching unwanted babies being dispensed like waste water and gave her the benefit of the doubt.

I was allowed to see Lynne for a few moments before I left the hospital. The only thing I remember about that visit was the idea that if we had to lose the baby, we hadn't lost each other. We still had the means of production to make another together. She was weak and tired. She had more of an ordeal than the rest of us combined who went through that gut wrenching night and I was just glad to know that she was going to be okay. Lynne and I had chosen the name Darryl for our son, because it meant 'beloved', and he was all of that and more. I went home and wrote a letter to our son, which I sealed and gave to my grandmother for safe-keeping. I revealed its contents to no one, not even Lynne. I just hoped it would come true. He was living with part of my heart.

*I had come to believe I was smart enough to get anything I wanted if I worked hard enough for it. While looking at my son through the glass window, I knew I would never have it all. It's a terrible thing to know when you're that young. It would also be true for Lynne and I was sorry I had failed to change the outcome. Three months later, Lynne and I went together, by ourselves, for her to sign his adoption papers as required by law. I wondered if he would ever know how much we loved him in that moment of surrender. We could only hope he would be raised with love and the opportunities we would have given him.*

*I never forgave Lynne's father or my mother for their decisions to deny us their support to keep our son. They were more concerned with preserving their image than recognizing the substance of our relationship. I forgave her mother and my father for their inability to overcome their spousal controllers.*



This is a fifty year record of the creative and spiritual development of the author. It is the life story of a first-born 'baby boomer' nurtured in an honest, working class family and his relentless quest to improve his understanding and search for enlightenment. It is a journey that formed the core of his character. He believes his tribulations and triumphs will resonate with and contribute to the dialog and musings of his generation.

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