A Pause in the Rain is a memoir about the author’'s late husband, Chuck Greenberg, who was a founding member of Grammy Award-winning music pioneers Shadowfax.

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ISBN-10 1-60145-018-4
ISBN 13 978-1-60145-018-0

All images contained within are from the author's archives unless otherwise attributed.

Printed in the United States of America.

www.joyhornergreenberg.com
2006

A PAUSE in the RAIN

A Memoir

Joy Greenberg

I

SOMETHING ABOUT HIS EYES

> With the gleam of a Christmas elf in his eye, he drew me into the magic of his musical dreams.
>
> Russ Davis

Chuck blew into my life much like the Santa Anas that accompanied him on a November day in 1980. Despite the raging wind outside, a forties-style fedora perched upon his strawberry blond curls. It was a color—magenta—my mother had once told me redheads should never wear, but on Chuck it was enchanting. His eyes twinkled behind oversized horn-rims and a crooked grin fought with a trim beard for attention. Sizing him up, I noticed his black shirt unbuttoned at the neck so that just a bit of reddish chest hair was exposed. Although he was attempting to be suave, I could tell that—like me—he was nervous, but Chuck immediately put me at ease. Uncorking the red wine he'd brought and lighting a cigarette, he began asking about the '55 Chevy Bel Air sedan he'd seen parked in the carport out front.

"That was my grandmother's in Dallas, and when she died two years ago, my mother drove it out to L.A.," I said, pleased that he'd

noticed my prized heirloom. "After my mother died last May, I decided to keep it."

"Cool." Chuck exhaled a plume of smoke. "Not that your mother died," he hastened to add, "but I've got a '65 Bel Air coupe. Maybe we can park them side by side and mate them," he deadpanned. The image of baby Bel Airs popping out of car trunks cracked me up and I momentarily forgot about the cigarette smoking, a habit I disdained.

Chuck "playing" a tripod, 1982,
courtesy of Frank B. Denman/Windham Hill Records

"Speaking of mating," I said, noting his reddish hair, "if we ever have kids, they'll all be redheads." It was one detail I'd remembered from high school biology: Red-haired offspring were the only possible results from red-haired parents. I immediately regretted this comment, thinking he might take it as an invitation to sex, which, of course, he did.

"Are you telling me you've genetically selected me for breeding purposes?" he shot back, apparently unfazed by my forwardness. I

laughed and turned bright red, wondering when I'd learn not to blurt the first thing that came into my head.

"I don't know," I said. "It depends on how well we get along..."

"Let's find out right now," he said, without missing a beat. He grabbed my hand and the bottle of wine. "Where's your room?"

"That isn't exactly what I had in mind," I said, but I was beginning to realize that Chuck was not someone who could be dissuaded easily. There was something alluring about this curly-haired guy with the sparkling blue eyes. "Upstairs," I said, pointing at the spiral staircase by the front door.

* * *

Our blind date had been set up as a spontaneous end to what began as a windy but otherwise routine Saturday. The Santa Ana had picked up even more by the time I returned from my late-afternoon skate. Sand and trash now littered the Venice Beach bike path, creating an obstacle course through which I had to jump and pick my way. Sweating from the combination of exertion and intense heat, I finally managed to clomp my way back to the beachfront apartment I shared, to find my roommate and his new girlfriend relaxing by the fireplace. As if it weren't hot enough already, they had a fire going. After all, Ted was from the East Coast, where hearthside fires were synonymous with winter, which it technically now was. He had just finished skating for the day too, and invited me to sip some wine with him while contemplating various possibilities for the evening's entertainment. With him was Tiffany, the latest addition to his stable of girlfriends: a long-legged, blonde nurse he'd met at Santa Monica Hospital, where he was finishing his family practice residency. I downed a glass of water, plopped onto the sofa, removed my skates and began cleaning the sand out of the ball bearings.

Tiffany lit a joint and passed it to me, asking if I had a date for the evening. I confessed that I hadn't. "Actually, I just broke up with a guy in New York," I said, between tokes. "I'm still licking my wounds. I don't think I'm in the market for a boyfriend right now."

"I know lots of guys," she said, throwing a sideways glance at Ted. "Let me know when you're interested in meeting them." It occurred to me that if I *were* to be looking, Tiffany could probably provide valuable assistance, for she seemed to have a handle on this issue. In fact, as she continued speaking, she revealed herself to be an expert. In a matter-of-fact tone, Tiffany allowed that she burned through men the way some people spend money, without the slightest heed to the consequences of their consumerism.

I took the bait. "Okay, you've aroused my curiosity. So what's available?"

Tiffany scratched her head and considered this question. After pausing for some moments, her eyes brightened and she ventured, "Well, there's always Chuck..." Her voice trailed off with what I perceived to be an element of uncertainty.

"So tell me about Chuck," I coaxed.

"Actually, I can't say enough nice things about Chuck," she said, regaining her composure.

My interest was piqued.

"He loves women and he's very nice to his girlfriends," she continued.

"How do you know?" I said.

"He's my roommate," she replied. "I know *everything* about him. Plus, he's got a great sense of humor."

We were beginning to get somewhere, I thought. Laughter was high on my agenda.

"But I should tell you a few more things," Tiffany said. Uh-oh, here it comes, I thought. I crossed my fingers that Chuck wasn't a

stalker or serial psychopath. "Number One," she continued. "He's got red hair—kinda like yours, in fact, only curlier."

"Oh," I said, the enthusiasm draining from my voice. I'd always thought that redheaded guys were dorky-looking—something to do with invisible eyelashes—but I was willing to reserve judgment until the initial sighting.

"Number Two: He's Jewish."

"Oh, no," I said before I could catch myself. "I just broke up with a Jewish boyfriend," I added quickly. "Maybe I need a change of pace."

"Chuck's from Chicago," Tiffany said. "You know," she advised with a hint of conspiracy, "the farther away from New York a Jew gets, the less fucked up he is." Before I could question her scientific methodology, she went on.

"Number Three: He smokes cigarettes." She already knew how I felt about that. "But he's trying to stop," she said, as if feeling the need to bolster his character. "By the way," she added, almost as an afterthought, "Do you like music? Because he's a musician."

Now, this fact was tantalizing. Like most thirty-one-year-olds, I was a devoted music fan, but fantasizing about being a rock star was the closest I'd ever come to one, aside from a stint in San Francisco as a Grateful Deadhead during my early twenties. So when Tiffany mentioned the magic word "musician," my attention was snagged. Visions of glitzy parties and beautiful people cavorted in my head, not to mention drugs. Weren't musicians notorious drug users? Still, I was wary. After all, what was any self-respecting musician doing home alone on a Saturday night? And the name "Chuck" didn't sound like a typical rock star name. "Charlie," maybe, but not "Chuck." Perhaps I needed to extract more information.

"So, what kind of music does he play?" I asked.

"Woodwinds—you know, flutes and saxes," she said. "And this really trippy wind synth called a lyricon."

While winds were not as glamorous as guitars, my father had played a silver Haynes and my last name, after all, was Horner. And, there did seem to be something karmic about a wind-player. Maybe this Santa Ana wind was a good omen, despite all the rumors about positive ions.

"Well," I said, trying not to sound too eager, "see if you can get him over here, but be discreet." I had my pride, after all.

With that, Tiffany got on the phone with Chuck, gushing, "Come over right now. I've got a hot one for you."

So much for "discreet."

* * *

Next thing I knew, Chuck was leading me up to my room, where we settled onto my king-sized waterbed. I wasn't accustomed to inviting guys into my bedroom on the first date. However, there really was something appealing about Chuck that made him seem different from all the other guys I'd known. He seemed like a man with a plan.

No sooner had we sat down than we could hear thuds and groans emanating from Ted's room, directly below mine. I recognized the source at the same instant I grasped it was not the soundtrack I had in mind for my blind date with Chuck. I considered blaming the noise on the wind before deciding Chuck was too savvy to believe this.

"Don't worry," I said, "I know it sounds like they're killing each other, but I never see any blood or bruises afterward. They're just having a little fun, if you know what I mean, heh heh." I tried to sound blasé, as if earthshaking thumps accompanied by a rhythmic humph... humph... humph happened all the time.

"I know all about Tiffany and her brand of 'fun,'" Chuck said, rolling his eyes. I noticed again their sparkling, elfin quality. "Must've been a good score at the hospital," he said, referring to the med samples that both Ted and Tiffany brought home from time to time.

"What's the deal with you and Tiffany, anyway? She said you're 'just roommates.' Is that true?"

"Absolutely," he said. "When my girlfriend split three months ago, I needed someone to help pay the rent. Turns out Tiffany needed a place after she got kicked out of the bass player's house for cheating on him. So I let her move in with me. Big mistake. The bass player's always asking me what she's up to, which puts me in the middle, 'cause she brings home a different guy every night."

"Doesn't she worry about STDs and stuff?" I said.

"Old Betty who manages our apartment asked her that once, and you know what Tiffany said? 'My dad's a doctor.'" Chuck shook his head.

"What the hell good does that do her? How can someone smart enough to become a nurse be so naive?"

"Don't ask me. She's just an airhead, know what I mean?" He chuckled. "An airhead from the Windy City."

"Well, airhead or not, she sure has good pot." I stuck the roach into the hemostat-cum-roach clip that Tiffany had given me earlier and offered it to Chuck.

"No, thanks," he said, waving it away. "I used to smoke dope, but not anymore. I have an addictive personality, know what I mean? I like dope too much. Used to be always high. Then, when I'd play music, I couldn't remember what I was supposed to play. I kept getting lost in a tune and having to start it all over again. Drove the other guys in the band crazy. Besides, pot makes me paranoid. Makes me want to sit in a corner and dwell on all the negative shit in my life, know what I mean?"

"Yeah, I guess so," I said, pondering this revelation. A musician who doesn't smoke pot? How could this be? My New York-influenced skepticism gaining hold, I began to wonder if Chuck really *was* a musician. "So tell me about your music. Have you made any records?"

"I was in a band back in Chicago in the early seventies. We put out an album—*Watercourse Way*—but it was the classic rip-off. We never saw a penny in royalties." He stared thoughtfully at his wine glass and lit another cigarette.

"What was the name of your band?"

"Shadowfax."

"Cool. I think I've heard of you guys. What's your music like?"

"Electronic, instrumental. I play winds. We had bass, keys, guitar and drums." So far, so good. His details matched what Tiffany had said.

"Can I hear you play sometime?"

"Sure, but I'm not playing the same stuff now that I used to play with the
band. Since the bass player and I moved out here from Chicago, we've been working up some rock tunes."

"Where're you doing that?"

"We rent a hangar out at Santa Monica Airport."

"You play your own tunes?"

"Of course. Just finished writing one, as a matter of fact."

"Really? Sing it for me!"

"Nah, I have a terrible voice. But the bass player has a good voice. He does all the singing. Next time we rehearse, I'll take you over to hear us."

"Great!" I was interested to hear that there was to be a "next time." "What else are you into?"

"Poetry, especially John Berryman's. Now *there's* someone who really lived on the edge, but I guess it goes with the territory.

Want to hear some of his poems?" Without waiting for an answer, Chuck took a sip of wine, dragged on his cigarette, and began reciting:

> Gentle friendly Henry Pussy-cat
> smiled into his mirror, a murderer's
> (at Stillwater), at himself alone
> and said across a plink to that desolate fellow
> said a little hail & buck-you-up
> upon his triumph

"What do you think?"

"W-e-l-l," I said, batting my eyes at him and drawing him down with me so that we were now looking into each other's eyes. "First of all, I haven't a clue what that poem is about, but I am impressed at your memorization capabilities. Secondly, Tiffany didn't call you a 'pussycat.' She said you're a 'teddy bear with a weapon.' What did she mean by that?"

Chuck leaned over and in one movement began kissing me and slipping his hand under my shirt. "Wouldn't you like to know?" he said. As I listened to a screen door slamming in the wind, I thought, *What have I gotten myself into now?*

II

ANOTHER COUNTRY

> The Chicago Four: G.E., Phil, Stu and Chuck—a scary bunch, seemingly drawn together as much by fear and loathing as love for each other.
>
> Alex de Grassi

The next morning, Chuck invited me to go garage saling with him. Over a breakfast of my huevos rancheros, he checked the morning L.A. Times and circled all the yard sale announcements within a few miles of Venice Beach. He also checked the used musical instruments section of the classifieds, which turned up one particular horn of interest: a 1941 Conn Ten-M Tenor Saxophone for two hundred bucks.

"Wow!" he said. "If this thing's in good condition, it's a real find!"

"Why?" I said.

"Because Conn stopped making it during the war when the government commissioned them to make war stuff instead. They needed bronze so badly that Conn melted down all the molds. Then, when they returned to making saxes after the war, they had to create new molds. Their postwar horns just aren't as good as their prewar ones."

"You know a lot about this stuff, huh?" I said. I hadn't heard him play yet, but I was learning to respect Chuck's business savvy.

"Well, I should," he said. "It's how I've earned my living for the past ten years. Let's go." I learned he'd been supporting himself by repairing horns for several local music stores as well as buying them used, fixing them up, and reselling them.

Next I knew, we were out the door, into the still-shuddering Santa Ana wind, and face-to-grill with "Ruby," as Chuck had dubbed his cherry red '65 Bel Air.

Ah, Ruby: the latest in a long line of vintage vehicles to be operated by Chuck. The bumper sticker read, "Another shitty day in paradise."

"I bought her literally from a little old lady from Pasadena," he said, more than a hint of pride in his voice. "She was in mint condition."

"Was?"

"She got hit by another car on the passenger side last week, so the door won't open. You'll have to get in on the driver's side and slide across. Or you can do what Tiffany does: Climb in and out through the open passenger window, legs first. Gives the guys a thrill, especially when she's not wearing underwear," he said, grinning.

Mulling over this image, I said, "Maybe we should take my car."

"No, really, Ruby's fine. All she needs is a spare tire."

"Don't tell me you've been driving around without a spare tire!" I gasped in disbelief.

"It's okay, I'll get one tomorrow." Chuck seemed astonishingly nonchalant about this, to me disturbing, fact. I'd been raised by an aerospace engineer father who was such a safety nut he'd made me take the train from L.A. to New York when I first went to college. He didn't trust airplanes because he claimed they were badly maintained. Before he allowed me to get my driver's license, I had

not only to be able to change a tire but also to take a written test of safety and maintenance questions created by him. One of his cardinal rules was never to drive without a spare tire. But, well, rules were made to be, well, broken, and Chuck inspired a faith I couldn't explain.

I checked to make sure I had my Auto Club card with me, decided we could always get towed somewhere if we got a flat, then slid inside and across Ruby's front seat, thankful that it was a bench, not buckets.

The roads required careful negotiation as we headed to Culver City, site of the Conn Ten-M. The Santa Ana had left its typical flotsam: garbage cans rolling sideways on Pico Boulevard, palm fronds and eucalyptus branches littering driveways. Chuck provided a running commentary about his musical background as he navigated the Venice back streets, telling me about how he'd shifted his creative interest toward music after leaving high school, where he'd focused more on photography.

His initial independent foray began with a rental place on Stuenkel Road in Monee, Illinois, during the early '70s. With bands such as Chicago and Blood, Sweat and Tears gaining popularity, Chuck heard alternatives to the blues he'd grown up with. Music that featured hot horn sections had galvanized him, inspiring his own creative horn and wind concepts. He began trekking into the city, getting together with Jerry Smith, a bassist who had been gigging with The Flock.

Before long, Chuck had joined forces with some other musicians to form a band they called K.O. Bossy. They started out playing cover songs of the hits, particularly the Kinks. They would also do "Good Morning Little Schoolgirl" and other weird stuff. The guys in the band were big partiers and influenced Chuck to join in their laid back, hang-out lifestyle that was required for a happening rock

band. They would play at a coffee house type of club called The Twelfth of Never in Richmond Park.

K.O. Bossy became a fixture at The Twelfth of Never and literally ran the place. They served the coffee, did everything—all the owners wanted was a cut of the "door." At one point the band decided to add a violin player, but they were still doing all cover stuff—no one wrote for the band, so they weren't doing anything really original—but they were like one big family. Although they recorded an album, it didn't propel the band to the stardom they had anticipated. According to Chuck's sister Suzin, the first pressings were off-center and produced a *wah wah wah* sound when they were played, although this has been disputed by a fellow K.O. Bossy band member. Needless to say, this didn't do much for record sales.

"Where did the band's name come from?" I wanted to know.

"K.O. Bossy was the name on the back of Curly Howard's bathrobe in a Three Stooges short," Chuck said. "I think it was called 'A-Milking We Will Go,' when the stooges put Curly in a milking contest. He enters the ring and has K.O. Bossy on his back."

One of those hanging out with Chuck in those days was Warren Flaschen, who, although two years ahead of him at Rich East High School, had not actually met Chuck there. One night Warren ordered pizza from Romano's, and the guy who delivered it to him turned out to be Chuck. They got to talking as Chuck handed the pizza to Warren and took his money. By the end of the evening Chuck was eating Warren's pizza with him.

Later, Chuck played with the McIan Forrest Stage Band, who went on to tour with the Bee Gees as their backup band, and when he returned from the Bee Gees tour he went back to delivering pizzas. This was when he wrote his first memorable—according to a longtime friend—song, "It's a Long Way from the Kitchen to Philharmonic Hall."

I wanted to know what it was like playing with the Bee Gees, my fascination with celebrities getting the better of me.

"Terrible. They were fucked up most of the time, and they only had me playing flute, when I really wanted to play sax."

After his stint with the Bee Gees, Chuck began showing up at the Situation Lounge in Steger. The Yazoo Shuffle Band played there, and that's how he met future 'Faxers Phil Maggini and G.E. Stinson, who were both in the band. Phil hailed from a neighboring town, Homewood, and had been playing in a group called Friends at the Valley View Young Adults Club in Frankfort. Friends got booked with a band called Mama's Bootleg Blues Band, which featured G.E. on guitar. It was Phil's first introduction to G.E. Friends had come on first and done a Paul Butterfield tune, then G.E. came on and said, "We're gonna open with a song the first band did but we're gonna play it the right way."

Eventually, Phil hooked up with G.E. in Yazoo Shuffle Band, and Chuck started coming around and jamming with them. Even though Chuck played a jazzy rather than bluesy sax—limiting the number of tunes he might do with Yazoo—they all liked each other, and a strong bond began to develop.

Like many bands, Yazoo's demise came about mainly through lack of funds to support the band members, but it didn't help that G.E. would often become visibly disgusted with the audience. One night in Bloomington someone in the crowd just stood up and screamed—really went wild—following one of G.E.'s guitar solos, although he didn't consider it one of his best. Contemptuous that the hapless fan didn't know the difference, G.E. walked to the front of the stage and spit on the audience, thereafter earning the nickname "Spit."

Once Phil, G.E. and Chuck began jamming together, the need for a keyboardist and drummer arose. The problem was solved when Warren began taking recording engineer classes in Chicago. He

befriended the teacher of the class, told him about the band's project and how they were looking for a drummer and a keyboard player who could play Mellotron. It so happened that Doug Maluchnik, a keyboardist who lived in New Jersey, had inquired about this course. Warren called him up, he came out and auditioned for the band, they decided it would work, and he joined up. At first he commuted between Illinois and New Jersey, where his family lived, but eventually they all moved to Illinois.

While Doug had never met drummer Stu Nevitt, he had heard of him. At that point Stu lived in Miami, played with a jazz group and took lessons from the same person who taught Bruce Springsteen's drummer, "Mighty" Max Weinberg. Doug contacted Stu who soon joined the rest of the band in Chicago. With the addition of Doug and Stu to the fledgling group, the as-yet-unnamed Shadowfax was complete.

The First Shadowfax, 1974: Phil, Doug Maluchnik, Stu Nevitt, Chuck and G.E. [l-r]

Chuck finished his back story about the band as he deftly maneuvered Ruby around a downed power line that had partially blocked the road. He had proven himself to be a cautious driver, belying Ruby's impairments. However, I was beginning to wonder if

maybe we should have taken Blue Bomber after all. I glanced around Ruby's interior and noticed it was actually in pretty good shape, except for the headliner, which was hanging in shreds from the ceiling like seaweed.

"What happened to the headliner?" I asked.

"Oh, that. I took Phil for a ride after he had a fight with Tiffany. He took out his aggression on the headliner…with his fists. I guess he was a little pissed off."

"A little?" Before I could further question Chuck about the bass player, we arrived at our destination.

The Ten-M turned out to be the property of an old lady whose husband had died recently. She had discovered the sax in her attic, and Chuck noted it was still in its original case. The old lady said her husband had only played it a few times before going into the service, and when he returned from the war, he was a changed man, no longer interested in music.

Chuck considered this information and said, "Does it still play?"

"I don't know, but you can try it out if you'd like," she said.

Chuck wrested the gleaming horn from its case and began examining it with what looked to me like real tenderness, the way a mother might hold her newborn. He depressed each key, then reached for the mouthpiece.

"The keys seem to work and the mouthpiece still has a reed in it, but the cork's pretty shot," he said, twisting the mouthpiece onto the horn.

Then, lifting the sax to his mouth, he blew out some notes. They were only scales, but I could tell he knew how to play it. His tone was rich and confident. This guy really is a musician, I thought. But can he play anything besides scales?

Chuck put the sax back in its case, schmoozed the old lady for a few minutes, then offered her one-fifty.

"My son told me not to accept less than one seventy-five," she said.

"Okay," Chuck said, pulling out his wallet. "I'll take it." He counted out the money and handed it to her.

Grabbing the sax with one hand and my hand with the other, he thanked the old lady, and we exited into the wind.

When we had climbed back into Ruby, I said, "You really are a musician, aren't you."

"What did you think?" he said, glancing up and down the street. Without waiting for an answer, he said, "Let's go to my place," pulling Ruby onto Pico Boulevard and heading to Santa Monica. "I'm supposed to meet Robit there in a few minutes."

"Who's Robit?"

"A Jewish South African ex-pat musician friend. We've been working up some of his tunes."

"How did you meet him?"

"Phil and I were standing in line at a movie theater in Venice and Robit was right behind us. We hit it off right away."

"What kind of music does he play?"

"Robit is actually more of a poet/lyricist than musician. Kinda like Bob Dylan on a bad day. Phil calls him a master of the 'abused folk song.' But we need someone to play with, and he needs backup musicians. We're going to go over some tunes today to get ready for a showcase next week. There's a guy from Virgin Records interested in doing an album with him. Maybe we can get him interested in signing Shadowfax too. Or Eko-Eko."

"What's 'Eko-Eko'?" I said.

As we headed to Santa Monica, Chuck described Eko-Eko, the band he and Phil were forming. Chuck had written a couple of rock tunes which he had recorded with Phil and some other musicians. "Sensory Overload" was composed in his Santa Monica apartment one night while listening to the urban cacophony emanating from

outside his window, a stark contrast to the quiet and peacefulness of the rural Illinois he had left:

> I live in a modern city,
> Twentieth Century all around me.
> Electric music is in my house.
> Voices of strangers come through my window.
> Traffic comes and always continues.
> My T.V. won't let me down.
>
> Down to the car and go to the store,
> My antique V-8 engine roars.
> Radio news tells me the score: sensory overload.

"Elevator Racing" evolved from a dream:

> We were elevator racing in the Empire State,
> To see how hot we could get the cable.
> Like living in a Frigidaire falling through space,
> In a twentieth-century fable.
>
> Because there's so few thrills up in the modern world,
> You feel so insecure.
> You've got to keep your head when the cable breaks,
> You've got to jump 'fore it hits the floor.

Chuck warbled the lyrics to me as we pulled into the carport of his apartment on Eighth Street in Santa Monica. The first thing to catch my eye upon entering Chuck's place was a baby grand piano that occupied the dining room along with a table upon which the artifacts of his horn repair business—instrument parts, saws, soldering irons and electrical wires—lay strewn. Globs of what appeared to be congealed glue covered the table. As soon as I

stepped inside, I was immediately attacked by a small, truculent, parrot—a blue conure to be precise.

"Blue! Cut it out!" said Chuck. "Don't worry. He won't bite, but he might go for your earrings. He likes bright objects like that."

"Don't you keep this thing in a cage?" I said, feeling for my earrings and cringing as Blue took a few dives at my head.

"Yeah, but he prefers to have a run of the house and to sit on my shoulder while I work."

I glanced around at the disarray, wondering how much of it was Blue's responsibility and how much was Chuck's, not to mention his absent roommate Tiffany, who had not struck me as a neatnik. I could see that the curtains framing the kitchen and living room windows had been shredded at their edges. In some places, the curtain hooks had been pulled out from the rod. Blue had resumed his perch on the curtain rod in the upper corner of the kitchen window and chewed on one of the hooks, which he grasped in one clawed foot. This was obviously a favored spot for him—globs of what appeared to be his poop dripped down the wall and curtains.

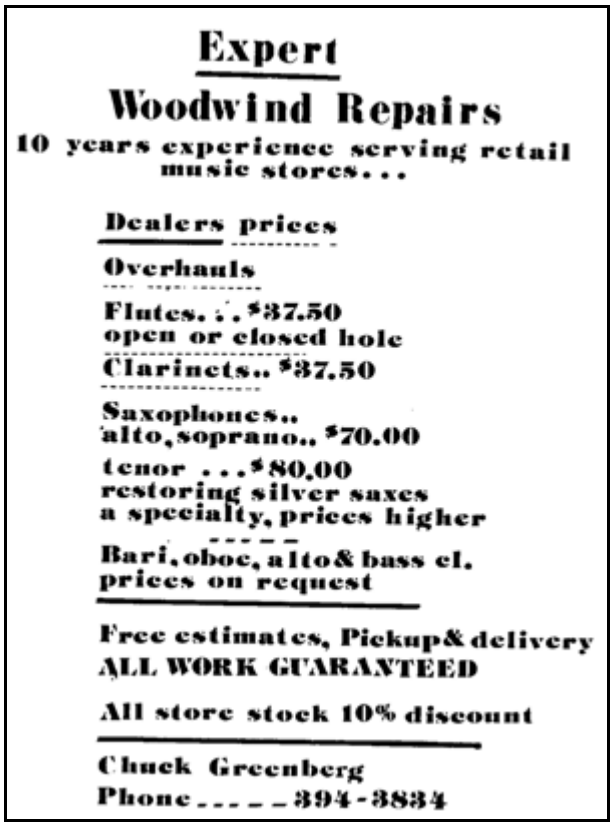
Despite my trepidation at spending time in such an unsanitary environment, I was curious about Chuck's music.

"Play something for me," I said to him as he scurried around trying to make the apartment a little more presentable. "I want to hear what the lyricon sounds like. How about *Watercourse Way*?"

"Nah, I've never been happy with the way it turned out. But I do have a demo of something classical I did with an Oberheim synth player named Linda Nardini." With that, Chuck walked over to a reel-to-reel tape player in the living room and turned it on. What followed was the most indescribably ethereal and unique music I'd ever heard, despite the roughness of the recording. It had an amazing range, from notes high like a flute down to a low tone like a bass clarinet. Chills corresponding to the sound frequency ranged through my body outside my control, from the highs that tingled in

my skull to the lows that rumbled in my belly. What kind of magic was this? Even with my untrained ears, I understood immediately that Chuck's was a talent destined for fame, if not fortune.

It was love at first sound.



Chuck's repair flyer, 1980

III

ONE WINTER MORNING

> …the violence and the unpredictability of the Santa Ana affect the entire quality of life in Los Angeles, accentuate its impermanence, its unreliability. The wind shows us how close to the edge we really are.
>
> Joan Didion, from "Los Angeles Notebook"

In a way, it seemed like we had dodged the first phase of "the game" before it had even begun. Chuck's spontaneity was a new experience for me. Somehow, it felt like I had known him for a very long time. What had begun as a not very promising blind date was looking like it might work into something more, despite—or maybe because of—the tension that is always in the air during a Santa Ana.

There is something downright disturbing about this Los Angeles weather condition known as the Santa Ana. It begins as an unnatural stillness that creates a foreboding—an expectation of doom that inspires some people to stay indoors, although they aren't sure why. Perhaps it is because of the accompanying rise in temperature, which often jumps into the upper nineties inland,

excessively high for winter. It just doesn't seem right, even to the native Angelenos, to be celebrating Thanksgiving or Christmas when it's so hot.

And then, there's the wind. It can only be described as disquieting, like the mistral of France or the *foehn* of Switzerland. Or the smothering simoon of the Sahara. During a Santa Ana, the wind rushes off the high deserts, through the canyons, reaching hurricane force. It has such a parching effect that the fire threat becomes extreme. And if, God forbid, a fire does start, it's quickly fanned into a holocaust. It is not a benevolent wind; it's an alien wind. It's an alienating wind. It's a wind that, as Joan Didion says, "shows us how close to the edge we are."

Paradoxically, it's also exhilarating and full of possibility. Like the day I first met Chuck, when I had awakened in my beachfront apartment—not to the usual chanting surf, but to the cables clanging against the Venice Pier flagpole. Everything that had not been secured was now airborne, blown by the Santa Ana that had roared in from the east and buffeted the sailboats dotting the horizon. Last night's glassy sea had become a festering froth. The air felt electrically charged and static-filled, playing havoc with nature's equipoise. I'd heard that this was because of the unusually high ratio of positive to negative ions during the Santa Ana and the twelve hours preceding it.

That November day made me understand why so many people were willing to endure wildfires, earthquakes, smog and drive-by shootings to live in L. A. Surfers appreciated it for the offshore breeze that molds and holds up the waves, creating a fine, white spray of water that envelops like a lacy cocoon, or pipeline, as the cognoscenti call it. From my apartment balcony I could see wet-suited bodies lifted high, then plummeting down the glassy face of the wave. The mid-eighties temperature was ideal for lolling on the

beach. The wind caressed without acting like a sandblaster. Sun worshipers had already formed a living patchwork in the sand.

An inexplicable excitement hovered like the gulls patrolling the tide line. Anything seemed possible on a day like this. I couldn't wait to slip on my roller skates and hit the Venice boardwalk. Soon I zipped along the bike path that meandered from Torrance to Santa Monica. Eight years earlier in 1972, the 18-mile bicycle path adjacent to Ocean Front Walk—the boardwalk that parallels the beach from Venice to Santa Monica—had been constructed. At that time, Venice was in a severe state of decay and in desperate need for redevelopment, thanks to a '60s policy of code enforcement that required all buildings to be upgraded to current building standards. Because many owners were unable to obtain the loans necessary to upgrade, 550 buildings—many along Ocean Front Walk and in the historic Windward business district—were razed. A lawsuit eventually stopped Venice's wholesale destruction, but it became a virtual ghost town except for the Beats and then Hippies who flocked to Venice for its cheap rent and tolerance toward pot parties, love-ins and drunken frenzies. It was during this period—in 1967—that I had attended a Doors concert at the Cheetah on the since-demolished Ocean Park Pier, memorable because of the terrible sound that was a fixture of pre-monitor technology.

Venice's rebirth in the '70s came about because the bike path allowed local residents to ride their bikes through the depressed parts of the city, bringing it new energy. Then, in 1976, the invention of the polyurethane skate wheel—which allowed easy gliding over concrete and asphalt—sparked the outdoor skating craze. Venice's wide Ocean Front Walk and bicycle path made it an ideal location for skating. Vendors began renting roller skates from outdoor lots along Ocean Front Walk, and tourists flocked to the area to experience the new sport. In 1980, I became one of those tourists.

From my starting point at the Venice Pier, I skated past an ever-changing cast of colorful characters, including One-Man Band who accompanied himself simultaneously with a variety of mobilized musical instruments, mutant body builders who frequented the fenced enclosure of weight machines known as Muscle Beach, Yiddish-speaking chess-players seated at concrete picnic tables in front of Synanon, and the Sheik—aka Harry Perry—a white-turbaned and robed, guitar-toting roller-skater who spun out Jimi-esque tunes with the help of his backpacked amp. Their vividness helped to distract me, for skating up and down the beach had become more than just an entertaining exercise. It offered an escape from the much more difficult work that I knew lay ahead of me: grief recovery.

* * *

I lost my parents and a baby sister by the age of thirty-one, and I had never come to terms with these events. The fact was I had come to feel less—not more—capable with each loss. Perhaps this was because I, like most Americans, had been taught how to acquire things, but not how to lose them.

I first became acquainted with The Last Enemy at the age of eight. My baby sister Tracy—born with a malformed heart before infant surgery was possible--passed away following a futile battle for survival. Other than a C-section, there had been nothing much eventful about her birth in 1956.

My mother decided to have Tracy at Good Samaritan Hospital in downtown L.A., then an hour's drive from our home in Whittier. A few days after Tracy's birth, my twin sister, Jill, and I went to the hospital with our dad, riding past tract homes dotted with orange trees. Soon the citrus orchards—once the ubiquitous trademark of L.A. suburbia—metamorphosed into oil fields, their rigs bobbing like giant mutant praying mantises.

The dipping sun created long, eerie shadows from the oil wells—stark profiles against the darkening sky. The hospital was like a huge hilltop castle glistening in artificial illumination, with a vast parking lot as its moat. All we kids could do was wonder and imagine what it looked like on the inside, for we—like all children in those days—were forbidden to visit.

So we waited in the car while Daddy went inside for what seemed like an eternity. Thirty minutes is interminable, of course, to seven-year-olds. We amused ourselves by singing songs and making up games to relieve our boredom. One of our favorites was Opposites. The rules were simple: we could say anything, however hideous or rude, so long as it was the opposite of what we really meant. It was our one opportunity to get away with verbal abuse that would otherwise be deemed punishable. I could say things like "I hate you and wish you would fall into a hole and die," and I wouldn't get in trouble. And Jill could respond, "Well, you're so fat you wouldn't even fit in a hole!" The first one to bring the other to tears won. It was an early lesson in passive aggression, at which we girls seemed to excel.

Daddy returned to the car with a look of relief on his face. Mommy and our new baby sister, Tracy Lynn, were healthy and fine. At least, she seemed so at first, but it proved to be a temporary illusion. Later we discovered that she was missing one of her heart chambers, causing her to have inexplicable convulsions beginning soon after her birth.

One of these episodes happened when I was changing her diaper. Tracy began crying uncontrollably, convincing my mother that I must have stuck her with a diaper pin—there were no disposables in those days. Then I started crying at being wrongfully accused, leading to mass hysteria in the Horner household. After several of these episodes, combined with Tracy's failure to grow in size, she was diagnosed with the heart defect.

When Tracy was nineteen months old, I awoke during the night to muffled sounds coming from her room down the hall. There were voices: one unidentified, low and masculine; one crying softly: Mommy's. Curiosity propelled me out of bed, stumbling in the dark, opening my bedroom door, blinking in the blinding lights from Tracy's room, spotting the large, tent-like structure covering her crib that had been placed in her room the week before. Even from my nine-year-old perspective, I knew something was wrong.

My eyes darted around the room trying to make sense of the incomprehensible: Tracy's crib covered with the half-opened oxygen tent revealing her absence and a police officer talking quietly and somberly to my mother, who was attempting to regain her composure through her tear-streaked, anguished face. For some reason, I went to school the next morning feeling not so much sadness as pride. Pride that this awful thing had happened but that I had managed to get through it and carry on as if death were merely a "badge of courage."

Horners in Seattle front yard, 1949: I'm on the left,
Jill's on the right, Daddy's in the middle

Once I had children of my own, I wondered how my parents held up so well when Tracy died. Then again, perhaps they didn't. Our mother tried to hide her grief from my sister and me, but months after Tracy died, while we were having horseback riding lessons, I

caught a glimpse of her as we trotted like some live carousel around the paddock. She was deep in conversation with a friend and appeared to be weeping. I surmised it was about Tracy.

Like Tracy, my father might have been saved had medical technology been then what it is today. A victim of rheumatic fever as a child, his mitral valve was damaged, causing his heart to fail when he was fifty. Although the surgery to replace his faulty valve was a success, he was no longer able to perform the activities like hiking he had once enjoyed. In fact, he became bedridden.

Unable to accept a sedentary lifestyle, he sought a heart transplant at Stanford but was turned down, partly because of his age—fifty-two was deemed to old at the time—and partly because he and my mother were divorced by then and the post-op social workers didn't believe he had the support group behind him necessary to help him pull through the ordeal. Devastated by their refusal to accept him as a transplant candidate, he lost all interest in life. He died from pneumonia a month after being rejected by the program.

My mother was only a few weeks shy of retirement when she suffered an aortic aneurysm. Unlike my father and sister, there was nothing that could have spared her, so quick and catastrophic was her condition. She had no warning that anything was amiss, except for some back pain during the day. Then, at the dinner table, she said, "oh," and keeled over. The coroner said that even if she'd been on the operating table when her artery burst, they probably couldn't have saved her.

I guess I come from a family of weak hearts. Both my parents died many years sooner than they were supposed to, according to the national average life span. My father was fifty-two; my mother was sixty-two. How much did the stress of losing a child affect their health?

This is something I hope never to learn.

The grotesquery of Venice Beach, therefore, posed plenty of diversions from my grief. Besides giving structure to my daily routine, skating allowed me to observe—without becoming personally involved with—these beach creatures. Like watching a movie in fast-forward mode. To slow down was to risk connection—something I was not yet prepared to do, or so I thought. First, I needed to connect with myself.

Within a few months, I had lost my mother, my boyfriend and my job. And I had not yet finished mourning the death of my father ten years earlier. I was angry, although if you had asked me at the time, I would have denied it. Me? Survivor of a third of my life spent in New York—where if you can make it there, you'll make it anywhere? Former designer at the largest privately owned jewelry company in the country? Degree-holder from one of the most prestigious universities in the world? Surely, all that should have prepared me for anything. But, of course, no amount of book-learning or street smarts had readied me for loss. I had learned how to acquire stuff but not how to give it up.

Yes, I was angry. Actually, ANGRY. I was angry with Life, for dealing me this unforeseen and unwanted hand, when I hadn't chosen to play the game. I responded by self-medicating. My losses became excuses for self-indulgence. And what better place to debauch than Venice Beach? I lost little time immersing myself in a haze of drugs and alcohol—anything to deaden the pain. Since my arrival in Venice, I had devoted myself to getting—and staying—high. Much as I might like to point a finger for my waywardness at the raging Santa Ana and its positive ions, in truth they were my hands lighting the joints and holding the drinks.

On the other hand, negative ions—created by the tremendous friction that predominates at certain places like the seashore—produce positive effects on mood, energy, libido and sense of well-being. Researchers have supported the view that high

concentrations of negative ions can increase both physiological and psychological arousal. Perhaps that explains why Chuck and I gravitated so easily toward each other, despite the malevolent wind.

Nah, we were just horny.

IV

EBONY WIND

> For something is never valued quite enough, until it has ceased to be. To one side stands a man who dances in the bamboo wind, screaming silver songs in reverse.
>
> G.E. Stinson, from a poem

After much arm-twisting, I convinced Chuck to play *Watercourse Way*—the first Shadowfax album—for me. "Why don't you want me to hear it?" I said, when he kept changing the subject.

"I've never been satisfied with it," he said. "Some of the tracks just weren't up to par. It really needs to be remixed, but it's out of my hands now."

"Why? What happened to it?"

"Passport Records has all the masters, and they're in New Jersey. They don't have any interest in it any more. But if you *really* want to hear it..."

"Yes!" I said. "I want to know if you're a real musician, or just a wannabe."

Chuck was correct in his assessment of *Watercourse Way*. Many of the tracks sounded frenetic, with all the musicians playing as fast as they could but not really together. But there were two

songs I liked: the title track, and a sweet, Renaissance/folky sounding duet with Chuck on wood flutes and G.E. on guitar called "Petite Aubade."

"I like this," I said. "It has a catchy melody. Who wrote it?"

"G.E. and me."

"I like 'Watercourse Way,' too. Who wrote that?"

"G.E. and me. You'll have to hear us play it live. It's killer."

Clearly, Chuck and G.E. were the best composers on this album.

"What's that instrument you're playing on it?"

"Lyricon. Do you like it?"

"It's mesmerizing. I've never heard anything like it before."

"That's because there are only about three of us who know how to play it."

In fact, the lyricon provided a distinctive, signature sound for the band and projected a fluid lilt that soared with emotion when played by Chuck. Co-invented by electrical engineers Bill Bernardi and Roger Noble, a lyricon prototype fell into Chuck's hands in 1972. The venue for this serendipity was the Chicago National Association of Music Merchants annual show. NAMM shows are an essential staple for all serious musicians, and Chuck, like many serious music biz people, made it a point to check out everything new on display there. In fact, some of Chuck's most productive networking occurred at NAMM shows.

Bill Bernardi and Roger Noble were the first to ask themselves what might happen when they crossed a wind instrument with a synthesizer. Their idea was for a sort of "electric flute" that could be played in an orchestra and would allow the musician playing it to be heard all the way in the back of the hall. They formed Computone, Inc., to begin production of a prototype, never imagining that someone like Chuck would come along, plug it into a *wah-wah* pedal and an echoplex delay, and be heard around the world.

In 1971, Bernardi and Noble applied for a U.S. Patent on an "Electronic Wind Instrument," and three years later first mass-produced wind synthesizer, the lyricon, came into existence.

Coincidentally, Chuck had been looking for something that would add some "punch" to his musical contribution to Shadowfax. In the early '70s, he had been rehearsing with them at the Triple B, working up tunes written by G.E. that tended to be very riff-based, electric and aggressive. Chuck felt a bit ill-equipped to hold his own in this very intense, high-watt musical environment. He needed a new voice to express himself, and to compete with the level of angst in the little room—its windows covered with mattresses—that was the precursor to Big Burn Studios.

"When he came to rehearsal one day, he was just flipping out about this 'fucking spaceship' of an instrument he had seen at the NAMM show," said Phil. "He was elated and totally animated while he described what he thought was the answer to his prayers." Chuck worked with a prototype for a while and continued to develop the instrument with Bernardi as required by the music: a breath controller and then a bending reed to match G.E.'s blues-based sitar-inspired riffs. "It was always a trip to see this weird futuristic instrument, with a red bandana tied around its end to absorb Chuck's spit before it had a chance to run down the long silver shaft and short out an electric key pad. We had never seen or heard anything like it before."

The lyricon initially combined a Boehm-type controller—the instrument part that the musician manipulated—with a synthesizer—the part that actually generated sound. Both the controller, which resembled a twenty-inch-long recorder, and the synthesizer fit into a single, velvet-lined unit about the size of a sax case. As an already accomplished flute and sax player, Chuck recognized right away that it was an instrument of great potential for him, since the fingering system was identical to most flutes

and saxophones. But, while the lyricon played similarly to a sax, there were two notable differences. First, the lyricon's reed did not vibrate—it only measured pitch. Chuck had to create vibrato and pitch bend by changing the position of his jaw against the reed in the lyricon's mouthpiece. Chuck had full dynamic control of the instrument's volume using only his breath.

Chuck demonstrating the lyricon, ca. 1974

Second, the keys were actually switches, and the bass clarinet mouthpiece only served to give the player the "feel" of a horn. Although there were some standard synthesizer controls that shaped the sound, most of the programming typified by a keyboard synthesizer was managed on the lyricon by playing: loud, soft, bright, mellow—whatever Chuck felt like. In this way, it was an instrument capable of truly reflecting its player's emotions.

The original Lyricon I was thus a wind controller which drove a computer that generated overtones. It had a shiny chrome finish with an elongated bottom piece and used a form of additive synthesis: Chuck dialed in the amount of overtones he wanted and

then blended that with the wind-overtoned section. This model had a key switch for a fundamental of G, Bb, C, Eb or F and a range switch of low, medium or high. The three octaves on the instrument combined with two octave-up transpose keys on the control panel gave it a functional six-octave range. It also had glissando, portamento and "timbre attack," an effect akin to chorusing that allowed Chuck to play something like chords.

The notes were very expressive and there was quite a bit of player control over the actual sound. The down side was that—like with other early synths—there was no way to "save" a sound. So the first lyricon players had to know the way the dials should be set for a sound, and hope they remembered those settings. Another problem was its player's lack of control over any sound source other than the lyricon-operating computer. In other words, the player was limited to playing the lyricon only through its synthesizer. In addition, adding more of the top overtones could give it a very unpleasant, "buzzy" sound.

Furthermore, in order to mimic a guitar—necessary for the times Chuck and G.E. wanted to play the same notes together—the lyricon had to be able to effect two notes consecutively so that they blended together without sounding discrete, also known as "bending." Because of these limitations, Chuck worked with Bill Bernardi—who had split with Noble—to develop the Lyricon II.

With the Lyricon II and its built-in synth, Chuck achieved this goal. Although the Lyricon II looked different—it came in a plastic case and had a black, brushed aluminum appearance—from the Lyricon I, it kept the same sax style fingering and base clarinet mouthpiece with a sensor on the reed to detect pressure. Still, it remained difficult to master, which was why there were so few players. And there were no teachers; Bernardi and Noble were engineers, not musicians. They knew how to build the lyricon, but they couldn't play it themselves. Chuck mastered his essentially by

trial and error—adjusting the knobs and testing the resulting sound—a time-consuming process at best which necessitated years to develop.

The vicissitudes of travel made playing the lyricon even more difficult. Chuck discovered that changes in climate could render all his careful programming ineffective. For example, places of high humidity like Seattle and Portland would wreak havoc with the electronics. Fortunately, not everyone in the audience recognized the resulting sound as a mistake; some, in fact, thought the weird emanations were intentional. Once, during a show in Chicago, Chuck went into a solo when the instrument's electronics malfunctioned and he began blowing out the "skankiest off-the-wall tweets and bleeps, playing some horny moose, cows-in-heat, wildcat burning, fire-trucks-on-drugs impetuosity" according to Chuck's longtime friend Bill Johnston. "Some guy in the front row went into ecstasy, thinking Chuck was blowing a solo so outside it would take the roof off the place." He began screaming, "Ornette, Ornette!" thinking Chuck was the reincarnation of Ornette Coleman. "Afterwards, the man came up and couldn't stop telling Chuck what a powerhouse that solo was," said Bill.

Because of the difficulties with mastering the lyricon, it was a hard sell to musicians. This was compounded by its "electronic flute" image that tended to limit the imaginations of potential players, prompting Chuck to write a letter one time. The recipient's identity is unknown, but the message is clear:

> To the editor—
>
> Too often misinformation and opinion are accepted as fact by readers of an article. It is worse still when misguided opinions in articles are presented as fact by unnamed sources.

> In the piece "Instruments of Ill Repute," the lyricon was singled out and described as "a gimmick, worthless," and as an "electronic flute." In reality, for a horn player, the lyricon is one of the most interesting and challenging instruments to be invented in recent years. It has vast musical potential, and if it is used as an "electric flute," it is only because of the limitations of the player.
>
> The unnamed source is also quoted as saying he "saw the instrument in a big, expensive booth at a trade fair in Chicago." I also found it at a trade fair in Chicago—it was a very small display. The manufacturer is not some huge conglomerate but a small company in Massachusetts, run by a few dedicated individuals interested in expanding modern music.
>
> What surprises me is that this person could see the instrument at all with such obviously limited musical vision.

Bernardi struggled to market the lyricon on more than a small scale. Although the Selmer band instrument company took over distribution in the early eighties, it was unable to market the lyricon successfully, especially once Yamaha and others began selling more competitively priced wind synthesizers. Bernardi eventually developed another company, Innovations Ltd., from Computone in Norwell, Massachusetts, but he no longer produces lyricons.

Despite these limitations, or perhaps because of them, the lyricon has become legendary. In 2003 I decided to sell on eBay one of three that Chuck had owned and played. On the first day I ran the auction, an intriguing response came from Chris Kraft, who lives in Boston and said that he was "a heavy metal guitarist in the mid-eighties playing the local club circuit when a friend had me check out a funny-looking album cover with the title *The Dreams of Children* by some band named Shadowfax. 'Who or what the

heck is that?' I said. Just one listen and I was hooked. From start to finish, I listened to that entire album. I never do that with any new CD, even up to this day.

"I just recently got back into listening to Shadowfax after many years of exploring other types of music. Since working on my own album the past two years, I thought of that 'horn' sound that I loved so much in Shadowfax. My internet research to find out what the band was up to turned up this instrument called a lyricon. A quick trip to eBay revealed one of Chuck's instruments—it was a déjà vu type of feeling. At the same time I found the lyricon on eBay, I was reading Joy's e-book about Shadowfax. When I got to page ten, I received an e-mail message from her! I have to go place a bid on that damn horn now or I'll be haunted."

Thus Chuck became known as the most proficient of all lyriconists—the instrument that "looked like a vacuum cleaner," as guitarist Alex de Grassi described it, but "sounded like angels," according to Windham Hill Records founder Will Ackerman. Now that keyboard synth players have created "samples" of his signature sound, Chuck Greenberg and the lyricon are virtually synonymous.

A Pause in the Rain is a memoir about the author’'s late husband, Chuck Greenberg, who was a founding member of Grammy Award-winning music pioneers Shadowfax.

A Pause in the Rain