

Willie

by Kevin Coons

It must have been twenty years before I first heard Willie Nelson's voice without the accompaniment of my mother's crying. She liked to listen to country music on the radio while she cleaned dishes, ironed shirts, watered plants, and whatever else the house demanded. This music was my soundtrack as I ran in circles around the dining table, arms flailing and laughing. I was always running in circles back then. But when Willie came on the radio something strange would happen. First, there was a pause, an intruder entering our little world, and then came the tears. "You Were Always on my Mind," "Blues Eyes Crying in the Rain," "Angel Flying too Close to the Ground" it didn't matter, they were all equally devastating to my mother. I didn't understand it then.

A few years later, she told me the story.

My grandfather was an honorable and strong man, a World War II vet, and a devoted husband and father. Like all great men, love was the only thing that could break him. His children had all married and moved on when his wife was stricken by cancer. He stood by her until she passed, and then found himself more alone than he had ever been in his life.

My mother tells me how hard his last few years were on him and the family. She would visit him and find him listening to Willie all day long, barely able to take care of himself. I can picture him there, watching the record spin in circles, a scotch in one hand and a cigar in another. Repeating the same cycle over and over. After all these years, the constant blows of life had finally gotten to him, and he was gone.

And there was my mother outside the door, having just lost one parent, and left to watch the other go. I don't know if she ever expected then that cancer would find her too. I don't know if anyone ever expects it.

Now, I find myself listening to Willie Nelson a lot, I put it on when I have to work around the house or when I just want to watch a

record spin. I find myself thinking not of my grandfather, and not of my mother, but rather of myself. I'm a child and I'm laughing and running in circles. Now with each passing year, each time the Earth circles the sun, I understand more and more why she cried.

