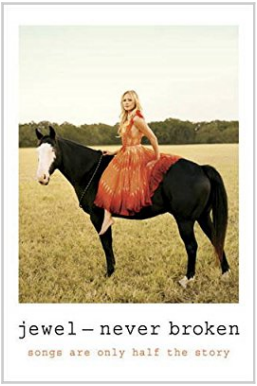

Never Broken: Songs Are Only Half the Story

By Jewel

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***New York Times* bestselling poet and multi-platinum singer-songwriter Jewel explores her unconventional upbringing and extraordinary life in an inspirational memoir that covers her childhood to fame, marriage, and motherhood.**

When Jewel's first album, *Pieces of You*, topped the charts in 1995, her emotional voice and vulnerable performance were groundbreaking. Drawing comparisons to Joan Baez and Joni Mitchell, a singer-songwriter of her kind had not emerged in decades. Now, with more than thirty million albums sold worldwide, Jewel tells the story of her life, and the lessons learned from her experience and her music.

Living on a homestead in Alaska, Jewel learned to yodel at age five, and joined her parents' entertainment act, working in hotels, honky-tonks, and biker bars. Behind a strong-willed family life with an emphasis on music and artistic talent, however, there was also instability, abuse, and trauma. At age fifteen, she moved out and tasked herself with a mission: to see if she could avoid being the kind of statistic that her past indicated for her future. Soon after, she was accepted to the prestigious Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, and there she began writing her own songs as a means of expressing herself and documenting her journey to find happiness. Jewel was eighteen and homeless in San Diego when a radio DJ aired a bootleg version of one of her songs and it was requested into the top-ten countdown, something unheard-of for an unsigned artist. By the time she was twenty-one, her debut had gone multiplatinum.

There is much more to Jewel's story, though, one complicated by family legacies, by crippling fear and insecurity, and by the extraordinary circumstances in which she managed to flourish and find happiness despite these obstacles. Along her road of self-discovery, learning to redirect her fate, Jewel has become an iconic singer and songwriter. In *Never Broken* she reflects on how she survived, and how writing songs, poetry, and prose has saved her life many times over. She writes lyrically about the natural wonders of Alaska, about pain and loss, about the healing power of motherhood, and about discovering her own identity years after the entire world had discovered the beauty of her songs.

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Editorial Review

Review
“From the very beginning of her recording career, Jewel's lyrics reflected the America she lived in with her conversational poetic touch. My friend Ben Keith brought her to my ranch to record, collecting our favorite musicians together for her early songs. The result, the enduring *Pieces of You*, was a great record. Jewel's lyrics resonated with the times. In this, her first memoir, she has a lot to reflect on, and the touch to tell her story well.”—**Neil Young**

“*Never Broken* reads like one of Jewel's songs—it's vulnerable, passionate and forthright. And it tells a compelling story, in this case, one about a young gifted woman's journey to becoming an adult and an artist. Her writing, too, is like her voice, which, bolstered by sturdy melodies, rings with honesty and clarity. This book is filled with deep, rewarding pleasures.”—**Anthony DeCurtis**, Contributing Editor, *Rolling Stone*

“Jewel’s life in *Never Broken* reminded me so much of my own. But if we hadn’t of come from hardship and nothing, we wouldn’t have made something out of ourselves. Her life is in her songs and in her voice, and after knowing her, I know it’s her soul. She is honest and tender, yet has a backbone and a fire that only comes from her roots. In her stories about her childhood I can’t help but see so much of my own. The good, the bad, the love, the heartbreak. It's all there and it’s all Jewel.”—**Loretta Lynn**

“Jewel is a truth-teller. *Never Broken* occupies that sacred space of soulful storytelling, hard-earned wisdom, and beautiful writing. I couldn’t put it down and I can’t stop thinking about it. This is a book that lingers in your heart.”—**Brené Brown**, Ph.D., author of *Rising Strong*

“Jewel renders an intimate portrait of a young woman who, although immensely talented, has spent her life "surviving and recovering and problem solving since being a toddler." [*Never Broken*] is lushly descriptive, chronicling the author's earliest days on the old "homestead," singing in saloons, busking in Mexico, and later living out of broken-down automobiles while trying to make a living in the music business. The author mines her psyche for the benefit of both herself and anyone else embroiled in profound emotional crisis….A moving musical essay that should strike all the right notes with a wide selection of readers.”—***Kirkus***

Jewel’s evocative and captivating how-to for living a full and creative life…Jewel’s writing is conversational poetry, filled with rich details, as she explores her heritage or explains what she taught herself about music, art, and the music business….Her book will delight her fans, [and] reach beyond that base to those intrigued by what it takes to be successful after years of plugging away. Jewel’s lyrics, generously included throughout, reflect her authenticity and generosity.”—***Publishers Weekly***

“Singer, and poet Jewel has lived a famous rags-to-riches story and now tells all the painful details of her turbulent life in this appealing memoir….Fans will be impressed by the singer’s tenacity and most likely shocked [as] she chronicles her struggle to earn a living, regain control of her finances, and maintain her marriage…Her determination to carve out a happy life in the midst of so much conflict is admirable, and her honesty is both bracing and appreciated….her story is sure to inspire.”—***Booklist***, STARRED REVIEW

“A deeply personal memoir [that] reveals a cycle of struggles and abuse that, until now, she had kept private….Jewel reflects on an abusive upbringing and the highs and lows of her professional career, including discovering that she was broke at what should have been the pinnacle of success.”—***The***

Tennessean

“Jewel’s *Never Broken* is the perfect celebrity memoir…*Never Broken* wants to be the story of a young woman from the hinterlands who stumbles into various experiences and reacts just the way her reader would. But her knowledge keeps sneaking through.”—**Daniel D’Addario**, TIME

About the Author
Jewel is an American singer, songwriter, poet, actress, philanthropist, and mother. She has received four Grammy Award nominations and has sold more than thirty million albums worldwide. She is the founder of Project Clean Water, and author of the *New York Times* bestseller *A Night Without Armor: Poems* as well as two books for children. Raised in Homer, Alaska, Jewel currently lives in Tennessee and Colorado with her son.

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but gray sneaks in

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hard-won

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a businesswoman

an artist

a nerd

an intellect

a heart

for I am all things

I am woman

W

O

M

A

N

and

W

H

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L

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human.

foreword

I should probably not be here today. I should probably not even be alive. Being alive, I should have become an addict, knocked up as a teenager, or stuck romantically in a cycle of abuse. If you look at my life at any stage you might've said, *This girl will never make it*, and you probably would've been right. What I had going for me, however, was that at a fairly young age I figured out what I wanted. Happiness. You have to know what you want to ever be able to have it.

Here are the broad strokes: My two brothers and I were raised by a musical family, and I spent my early childhood performing with my parents in Anchorage for tourists. When I was eight, my mother left and my dad moved us to the family homestead in rural Alaska, a log cabin with creek water to drink, no plumbing or most modern conveniences. My dad did the best he could, but handled the stress of being a single parent by drinking and perpetuating the only parenting style he knew—the one he was raised with—which was creative at its best, and abusive at its worst.

At age fifteen I was finally fed up, depressed, and worried that if I didn't make a break for it I would lose myself entirely. I decided to move out. Aware that by doing so, the probability of me becoming just another statistic was high. Kids like me end up doing the same thing we saw while being raised . . . there are rarely happy endings. I wanted to beat those odds, and I knew that to do so I would have to use all my logic, heart, wit, and talent to end up differently. To be different, I had to act different. Which left me with a problem: how do you act differently than the way you are taught? This question set me on a journey to learn a new way of being, so I could create a life with a different outcome, rather than just feel fated to repeat the cycles and patterns I was familiar with. I vowed to study myself and my life like a scientist, to see what did and didn't work—how to get what I lacked and so desperately wanted: happiness.

So at fifteen I moved out on my own and paid my own rent on a one-room cabin by working several jobs. I got a scholarship to a private school at sixteen. I put myself through high school and graduated. I became homeless later that year. I was discovered by record labels at nineteen. I became a worldwide phenomenon at twenty-one, traveling the globe nonstop. I fell in love at twenty-five. At thirty, I found out that not only was all my money gone, but I was several million dollars in debt. The same year I came to feel that my mom, who was also my manager, was not the person I believed she was. And here I am today. Forty years old, newly divorced. I earned back a fortune, I'm discovering new ways to do business. Finally, there is my greatest success: I am lucky enough to be a mother. And I'm still continuing the journey, relearning how to be truly safe in the world, and it isn't what I thought. It's not by avoiding pain in life—that's impossible—it's by knowing that safety is in vulnerability, not in armor. It sounds counterintuitive but it's true. Life takes each of us to the anvil, shapes us with fire and hammer, and some of us break while some of us become stronger, more able to face the day. Even happy.

The great myth is that you need money, time, love, education, expensive therapy, a house, a fill-in-the-blank to get the happiness you want. I am here to tell you, *you need nothing other than what is in your heart.* How much do you believe that you deserve something, and how willing are you to do whatever it takes to achieve it? Personal growth, fulfillment, success, and even happiness—be it personal or professional—are not for the lazy, for the faint of heart, for the victim, for the one who passes the buck. Change is for the warrior. If you look in the mirror and say, *I am willing to be the one who is accountable and take responsibility for my own happiness and the shape of my own life*, then I welcome you as a friend on this journey. I believe in you. I believe we are whole, intact, and capable of claiming the quality of life we all deserve. This I know: our essential self cannot be erased no matter what we endure.

The truth is that no one can keep you captive. No one can keep you unhappy. No one can keep you abused. Our lives rise to the level we accept. I do believe we can rise from the screaming blood of our losses, of extreme pain, physically debilitating emotion, psychological neglect, and apathy, and not merely survive, but thrive. We do not need to let our histories or our losses define us except in the way we choose. We can use them as fuel to create real depth, beauty, connectedness, and compassion in our lives. Our stories can make us exceptional people, not damaged ones. If we choose to be truthful with ourselves. And if we choose to digest and release the pain rather than try to avoid it. This is how pain accumulates and creates more pain, leading to neurosis, pathology, and brittleness of spirit.

We cannot always control or avoid what happens to us, but we can control what it does to our spirit. And the quality of our spirit becomes the filter through which we see life. And as the philosophers say, reality is our perception of it. I believe those words. Our reality is what we believe it to be. What we believe informs our thoughts. Our thoughts inform our actions. Our actions build our lives.

My own life has been an exercise in challenging my beliefs so that I could reimagine my future. So that I could avoid becoming the statistic and instead become the architect who tried to consciously draw the lines of her own life, free of the heartbreak that birthed me.

When I first left home, I got a few jobs, singing locally and giving horse rides to tourists, and at night I would get out my notepad and pen to write. I called my journal “the happiness project,” and I had no idea that it would lead me not only on a journey of deep personal discovery, but would also lead me from the fishing village of Homer, Alaska, to songwriting, to the White House, to the Vatican, to the cover of *Time* magazine, and beyond. Most important, the exercise of writing and looking inward led me to myself, and to discovering my own definition of happiness. It is a journey I am still on today. But I get ahead of myself. Let’s start at the beginning.

one

pioneer spirit

My name is Jewel Kilcher and I am an Alaskan. My grandparents on both sides helped to settle the state in the late 1940s, when it was a territory still. When my grandparents settled in Homer, it was a frontier town, a small fishing village with very few modern conveniences. It might as well have been the 1840s. My dad rode in a horse and wagon to town when the tide was low enough to give passage below the steep cliffs of Kachemak Bay. Living was hard, and those who were drawn to Alaska in these early days, before its statehood, were self-sufficient and idealistic, wanting to carve out a new existence in an untamed land. The women were incredibly strong, often raising kids and also running homesteads while the men were out hunting and on adventures. This meant killing and canning food, keeping livestock, shoeing horses, felling trees, hauling water, making jams, fishing, drying salmon, and keeping the precious sourdough starter alive and well in an icebox. Beheading and boiling chickens, preserving cooking fat in lard cans . . . the list goes on.

I have heard stories of the larger city of Anchorage during this time, when women and young girls and boys were not allowed on the streets after 9 p.m. for fear of rape. The streets were mud, and citizens carried firearms openly. It felt as lawless as the much older Wild West depicted in the movies. The people were spirited, with flint in their eyes and dreams in their hearts, looking for gold claims or just an escape from the rest of the world to live the way they wanted to live.

I owe much of my success to the pioneer women of Alaska. Today they are still strong and self-sufficient, not wilting flowers waiting for a man to help. They shoe their own horses and peel logs and build homes and get anything done that needs doing. They are feminine and wild as a mountain meadow. I owe a tremendous debt to the women I was raised amid. My paternal grandmother, Ruth, was a supreme example, and she and her husband, Yule, taught each of their eight children everything that was necessary to survive. While women in Alaska certainly knew they were physically weaker than most men, it never meant they weren’t clever enough to find a way to get the job done. My aunts used chain saws and axes like an artist’s chisel to build furniture and cut lumber. They operate their own businesses, travel the world, run cattle, and are Marine Corps colonels and chefs. I was so lucky to be raised believing in some part of myself—believing that if I put my mind to something, I should be able to figure it out. My parents did not coddle me, and I was allowed to explore my mind. I read books by great authors and never assumed my mind had a sex, much less a weaker one. It wasn’t until years later, as I traveled the rest of the world, that I realized this was something unique. This is not a message many young girls hear during their childhood, and we do them a great disservice. I was not a child who had a lot of self-esteem, and had little else working in my favor. Often I felt broken and insecure, ugly and odd, but this one core belief was a tremendous blessing that gave me the courage to face my life and take it on my own terms. The fabric of my very being would become so threadbare, but when push came to shove, this belief was enough at times to pull me through. It is at the core of my character, and something I can take no credit for.

I also owe much of my adventurous spirit to the spirit of Alaska. It is a big, untamed country that has much to offer for those willing to fight for it. The land provided for us, but it was never a simple give. The rivers are cold and strong, full of glacial silt that will fill your boots and drown you. The bay is full of fish, but the weather can turn quickly and a mere five minutes of exposure to that gray, cold water is enough for hypothermia to set in. The mountains are full of glaciers, fresh water, game, and berries, but navigating them is exacting and they demand grit and respect. The summers are full of daylight—the sun never sets at the peak of summer solstice—providing a short but productive growing season for those willing to weed gardens and fields of potatoes. The soil is black and rich, full of minerals from glacial runoff. The grass is stout and keeps livestock in good flesh. I remember riding my horse all day at the head of Kachemak Bay, where the three glacial rivers meet and where we would graze our cattle for the summer. It was open-range grazing, no fences, and it was a truly beautiful sight to see cattle and horses roaming free in the large grass valley, the Sheep, Fox, and Swift Rivers cutting like silver blades through the thick green. I would spend my days alone up there on my horse, chasing eagles on the beach. I would climb cottonwood trees to see if I could peek inside their nests. One evening, when I was about fourteen, I remember returning home as the sun was just turning golden, and I was unfathomably starved. I looked at the clock in the cabin to see it was 2 a.m.—I had been out all day and most of the night, my biological clock fooled by the long hours of daylight.

Jasper Jewel Carroll, my maternal grandfather, was the thirteenth child of coal miners, and his mother, knowing he would be her last, decided to name him after all the precious stones that line the path to the gates of heaven. Everyone called him Jay. My maternal grandmother's name was Arva. They were among Alaska's first settlers, living in a log cabin with a dirt floor in the beginning. They were Mormon, dating way back, and had six children. Their eldest daughter, Nedra Jewel Carroll, is my mother.

Jay was a bright young man and good with mechanics. He built a snowmobile out of spare parts before anyone had seen one around that part of the woods. He built his own plane and then taught himself to fly it, eventually becoming a legendary bush pilot. He was known for treacherous landings in remote mountain regions, to find game for hunters or to take adventurous souls to untamed land. He was also something of a drunk, which is how he lost his left leg. He was flying half-lit in a blizzard with a client, who was also half-lit, I can only imagine, and they crashed into a mountain. They hiked to a small cabin and were rescued eventually, but not before severe frostbite and gangrene set in.

I knew my grandfather only years later. He was sober by this time, and had yellowing gray hair that was slicked back with thick pomade, the way I imagined sailors wore it in the '50s. He chain-smoked wherever he was, indoors or out. He wore thick glasses and polyester pants. I remember watching with great curiosity as he sat down each morning in his La-Z-Boy recliner to put on his socks. He had a large, hard, round belly that protruded like a melon from under his wool flannel shirt, and he had to strain to bend around the thing to reach the socks to his toes. His prosthetic leg was smooth flesh-colored plastic and disappeared quickly beneath the sock. He hardly ever said five words, and those words were usually commands. "Jewel, hand me that remote." "Arva, 'bout time for lunch." "I'm headed out for a drive."

Grandpa Jay had a routine everyone in town set their clocks by. Ham steak and eggs for breakfast, then a drive out to the gas station in his black El Camino, with a red firebird brazenly painted on the hood. He owned the station and his son Jay Jay helped him run it. Then home for lunch, that El Camino crawling at 45 miles an hour back to the house. Lunch. Nap. Drive out to the Spit (a large tongue of land that juts into the water, a famed attraction of Homer), the horses under the hood never given a chance to let loose. He was such a famously slow driver that folks in town could be heard saying, "Well, it's two o'clock, better get on the road before we get stuck behind Jay."

Jay died of a perforated ulcer. He collapsed in the bathroom at home, blood spilling everywhere. At the hospital, after they announced he'd passed, the nurse came out with a ziplock bag that held a neat roll of two

thousand dollars cash. She handed it to my grandmother, saying they had found it in his hollow leg.

For years after Grandpa died, I could not keep my mind from wandering morbidly when I went into that bathroom. I would stare down at the linoleum flooring and imagine my poor grandmother, dutifully cleaning all that blood from the very spot.

My grandmother Arva was the quintessential doting grandma. In a world where nothing was stable or kind or sweet, she was its counterpoint. She was affectionate and warm. She gave me Twinkies and doted on me and I knew she loved me. I stayed with her often, and had a small room that was sort of mine. I watched her, ever the subservient housewife and slave in the kitchen, serve Grandpa. But with me, she was funny, and opinionated even, though always in her kind way. She took me to church with her and always made sure I had a nice little dress to wear.

I got the feeling she had lived her life for everyone else and she was just waiting for the chance to be free. Once, when I was a teenager, she said to me, “I sure hope your granddad dies soon so I can go live a little.” This floored me, as she never said a cross word otherwise, much less such a shocking confession. We were in the car, and I remember the soft, round outline of her cheek, her smooth nose in profile, as she paused a bit too long, as if contemplating the one stop sign in town.

After Grandpa died she got a new hip and an RV and hit the road, visiting relations all over the Lower 48 (what we Alaskans call the continental U.S.). I was happy for her.

• • •

MY PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS were Ruth and Yule Farnorth Kilcher, a middle name my grandfather invented for himself. They had come to Alaska from Switzerland. Well, actually they were living in Germany at the time, just before World War II. My grandfather told me that they were part of a group of young idealists from various disciplines—painters, singers, filmmakers, philosophers—determined to leave Europe before the war. They had heard that the Territory of Alaska was giving away homesteads, free land to anyone willing to settle the wild country. They sent a scout, Yule, a dashing and charismatic philosopher, musician, chess player, and linguist, to go ahead and secure the place. Reportedly, he stowed away on a ship and was discovered by the crew. When he was brought before the Italian captain, he recognized the officer’s dialect and guessed the town in Italy where he was from. Yule guessed correctly, and followed up the trick by singing folk songs particular to that region. The captain was suitably impressed, and I like to imagine my grandfather and that captain, drunk from wine, singing songs as they sailed through the dark night. Yule eventually made his way to the New World. He hiked over the Harding Icefield with a ladder on his back, and when he came to a crevasse in the ice, he would lay the ladder over it, walk across it, return the ladder to his back, and keep going. It took him two years, but he finally arrived in Homer and secured a homestead free of charge, a gift from the government. He sent word to his comrades, telling them to come on over: he had found a beautiful place, and they could create their Utopia. But everyone had moved on with their lives. Everyone but Ruth. Ruth was an aspiring opera singer, and she decided to leave her dreams of singing, her loved ones, and everything she knew, to marry a man she hardly knew, because she felt that if she was ever going to have children, they must be raised in a free country. With the war imminent, she left a modern Europe for a new and unsettled land to become a pioneer woman. No electricity, no water, no market. Just mountains and a fertile but unforgiving land. They built a cabin from trees they felled. They took a horse and wagon to town on the beach at low tide. She learned to hunt, can, and cut hay by hand.

Ruth had eight children, six girls and two boys—Mairiis (who we called Mossy), Wurtila Dora, Linda Fay, Attila Kuno, Sunrise Diana Irene, Edwin Otto, Stellavera Septima, Catkin Melody—and taught them all how to sing. The family sang folk music from the old country instead of saying prayers before each meal, and

music was passed down to generations in our family like antiques or heirlooms are in others. Songs are my history—the story of us. Where there was pain in our family there was also song not far behind, and healing.

My dad is Attila Kuno Kilcher. We call him Atz. He was the fourth child and eldest son, born in Switzerland while his parents were there visiting relatives. Atz's childhood was a mix of tremendously hard work and also creativity and freedom that his parents fostered in living generally by the principles of the philosopher Rudolf Steiner.

When I was young, I would hitchhike to town, and once my rides found out I was a Kilcher, they would say, "My, how lucky you are!" But they did not live with my grandfather. I would quip in the glib tone of a teenager that "Yule was a man loved dearly by all but those who knew him well." A cynical thing for a teenager to say, but I was trying to get at a point that was hard to speak about—the gap that often lies between a person's higher self and their struggles with the darker self. Yule was enigmatic and brilliant, but like many early settlers of the West, he had a hell of a hard streak. You had to, I imagine, to tame wild land. To build rafts of raw timber and sail across uncharted Alaskan waters. He also had an abusive streak, physically and psychologically, and Ruth and many of his children suffered dearly when his moods turned dark.

Yule was a state senator for one term, and upon hearing he'd lost the reelection, my dad offered his condolences while they were driving together somewhere. Yule was so angry and embarrassed by the defeat that he accused my dad of being happy about the loss. He screamed repeatedly, "You're glad your old man has lost! I know what you're thinking!" until my dad began to doubt what he had actually thought in the first place. It is the first memory my dad has of his own psychological suffering. Physically, Yule hit my dad often, backhanding him head over heels or striking him with a tool that Yule deemed had been fetched too slowly. When Yule found out my dad had been smoking, he made my dad strip down naked and then walked around him and whipped his whole body. Yule built many layers of shame and cruelty into his abuse and punishments, in both mind and body. My dad suffered a lot of trauma in his childhood, and then went off to Vietnam and sustained more.

My dad never heard the words "I love you" from his father until Yule was on his deathbed. In his final hours a miracle occurred. Yule softened and looked at my dad and said he was sorry, that he loved Atz and was proud of him. That moment changed my dad's life. It gave him something he had needed so desperately. Many stories like my dad's end without hearing those words. Many stories like mine end without a parent making amends, or achieving a loving, honest relationship. Mine did, because of my dad's willingness, and my own, to do the hard work it takes to learn a new emotional language. He and I share a common goal: to be accountable, fulfilled human beings. I have a relationship now with my dad that I cherish.

As for Yule, I loved and feared him. He was one of the brightest men I have ever known, and when he gave you his attention, you felt like the sun was shining on you alone. He spoke many languages and knew the root words that unified them. He was forever espousing philosophy. His temper was quick, though, and his sharp mind could turn on you, leaving you bare. He would walk into the barn where we lived, unannounced, and begin to read our mail. He had a thick Swiss accent and wore a beret over his thinning brown hair. He smelled of stout sourdough bread and garlic. He was not overly tall, but was lean and powerfully built, with chiseled features.

Ruth was the perfect counterpoint. Her Swiss accent was gentle, lilting, musical. She was every bit the poet and artist. She had high cheekbones and wore her long hair in a simple but elegant fashion. She wrote and won awards for her column in the Anchorage paper.

Yule helped draft the Alaska Constitution. After they'd signed it, the jade chandelier that was hanging

overhead broke, and each man took several pieces. I remember my grandmother telling me the story, pressing a cool shard of that jade into my young hand.

As Yule became political and went on to be elected as a Democratic senator for one term, it was up to Ruth to run the homestead along with her children. As the years turned to decades, the abuse and long winters finally wore her down, and she took Catkin, her youngest, still a baby, gave up her stake in the homestead, and went to the Lower 48. She married a Marine and lived out the rest of her days in Knoxville, Tennessee. Years later I went to visit her there, and she gave me a self-published book of her poetry. It was called *Voice of the Initiate*. She told me of her youth in Switzerland, her dreams for the artistic colony in Alaska, how she gave up her dreams of singing to have kids in that beautiful wild country. How she taught singing to all her children. She had tears in her eyes as she pulled a file from a box near her bed. Inside it were press clippings of mine. She said it had been worth giving up her dreams to see them come true for me.

I honor and respect the generations who have come before me, and I wrote them a song about this unpayable debt of gratitude. I was privileged to perform it as a duet with Dolly Parton on my newest album.

My Father's Daughter

She stepped off of the boat to see flowers in his hand

The man she would marry was as hard as the mountains

She had his children in a log cabin

Soon I'd be another star in this family's constellation

In the land of the midnight sun

Searching for gold

I am my father's daughter

He has his mother's eyes

I am the product of her sacrifice

I am the accumulation of the dreams of generations

And their stories live in me like holy water

I am my father's daughter

My father raised me in an old log cabin

And he sang for me the songs his mother sang to him

In honkey-tonks and empty bars,

Just me and him and that old guitar

He passed on a legacy wrapped up in a melody

And I carry on

Searching for gold

I am my father’s daughter

I have his eyes

I am the product of his sacrifice

I am the accumulation of the dreams of generations

And their stories live in me like holy water

I am my father’s daughter

Every time I step onstage

And the music finds me

I don’t need gold to remind me

I am my father’s daughter

I have my Grandma’s eyes

I am the product of such sacrifice

I am the accumulation of the dreams of generations

And their stories live in me like holy water

I am my father’s daughter

Oh

I am my father’s daughter

two

broken harmonies

But we did not always live on the homestead. We started out in Anchorage. We started out as a family, with a mom and everything.

My father was the first one of his family to carry music from a passion into a profession, and began writing his own songs when he was a teenager, eventually making a living at it. He took his guitar to Vietnam, where music helped him to assuage the trauma of his childhood and the effects of war. When he met my mother, he found a new family in her religion that felt safe to him. He converted and they were married in the Mormon Church. At first they lived in a remote cabin at the head of Kachemak Bay. They had their first child, my older brother Shane, in 1971. Their second son, Vance, was born in September of 1972. He died suddenly, before he was a year old.

My dad decided to pursue academics, and they moved to Utah, where he got his master's degree in social work at Brigham Young University, becoming the first college graduate in his family. I was born there in 1974 while my dad was attending school. When he graduated, we moved back to Anchorage, where he worked with troubled youth. We lived in an apartment until my dad had the money to build us a larger house. Only a few memories stand out for me. I remember feeling safer by making myself a pallet of blankets by the bedroom door, choosing to sleep there instead of in my bed. I remember a giant rotating Big Boy sign across the street. I remember a small kitchen window where sunlight streamed in. When we moved to a larger house shortly after, I got my own room and was allowed to pick my own carpet—pink shag. My younger brother, Atz Lee, was born in 1976.

Around this time my parents began to sing together, first doing dinner shows at hotels for tourists. Their act evolved into a variety show that consisted of some original songs (my dad singing lead, my mom harmony), a segment where they showed a 16-millimeter film that documented Dad's family pioneering and settling the state, and a few skits with him dressed as a sourdough (local vernacular for an original Alaskan settler: part gold miner, part hillbilly, part frontiersman) and my mom as a can-can saloon girl with a feather boa and long, curled rooster feathers in her hair.

Music was the happy part of our lives. The sound of my parents practicing during the day, melody and harmony wafting through the house like the smell of baking pie, but for the ears and for the heart. Warm, sweet. Me, wandering around the house till I found them, engrossed and focused. I loved that focus. Even more than the singing, I loved the feeling of being so overtaken by something. At a very young age I fell in love with the puzzle of harmonizing and learning melody and vocal control. I became fascinated with the effort of learning, so consuming that everything else left your mind. The time travel of losing yourself in practice. Even when there was fighting in the house, even when practicing with them was hard, I loved the puzzle of trying to get better. No matter how much my dad yelled or how impatient and angry he was to work with, I hung in there. Shane and Atz Lee were part of the act at first but could not tolerate the heated and often agonizing practice sessions with my dad. I practiced all the time. In my room. At school. Learning to yodel is probably the reason I had no friends in kindergarten. It's just not a pretty thing to learn. My brothers teased me, saying that I sounded like a cross between a dying seal and a cow in labor. But I was determined to learn because my dad had told me I was too young to. What an insult! Too young? I took it as a challenge and became obsessed with disciplining the crack in my voice. Teaching my tongue to obey the tongue twister of *yodel-ay-ee yodel-oh-oo yodel-oh-oo yodel-ay-ee* over and over until I had it mastered. My gratification was in practicing, and when my dad said with delight that I was ready for the stage, I had an unfamiliar sinking feeling.

I was five when I first went onstage, my handmade Swiss outfit awkward and itchy. I was so nervous that I got the hiccups, though luckily no one could tell because yodeling sounds like hiccupping anyway. The crowd of hundreds clapped with thundering enthusiasm, but I was too embarrassed to stay and I bolted offstage. I was not a ham or an outgoing child, but what hooked me was feeling like I had done something—I'd won a battle I wasn't supposed to have won. I YODELED! Hear me roar! Soon my dad was using me during the daytime as a tease for the nightly show. I got into my little outfit proudly, stood in a hotel lobby near the check-in desk, and I yodeled my little heart out as boatloads of Japanese tourists snapped pictures of the cute blonde American girl, while my dad sold tickets to that evening's performance.

Before shows, I played in the elevators while Shane, all of eight years old, set up the lights and learned to run the sound equipment (he was running all the gear for the show by the time he was nine). During breakdown afterward, I blew out all the candles on the tables, dipping my fingers in the cooling wax to create casts of each digit. Endless fun. In the off-season we toured native villages, singing for Inuit (we don't call them Eskimo—it's a derogatory term). I have dreamy memories of my parents and me being dropped off in an ice field at midnight in broad daylight, as the sun never sets up there, and being picked up by natives on

dogsleds and taken to a host's house. Being presented with a whole moose leg, longer than my body, for dinner, with salty homemade bacon and a concoction of seal oil, sugar, and snow that they passed off as ice cream.

We sang in village after village, my parents and I. My dad and I developed a bit where we selected an audience member to compete for a prize. My dad would teach them to yodel on the spot, then they would go head-to-head with the six-year-old, and the winner got a bottle of wine. We always let the audience member win. Alcohol was illegal in the villages, so we used sparkling apple cider for a prize, which still almost caused a riot. Just the sight of that champagne-shaped bottle nearly got us trampled. I remember the natives being warm and reciprocating. After our show, they entertained us. I remember seal mittens and polar bear boots and beautiful woven fans and the smiling beautiful brown faces dancing with stories about hunts and love and death and birth.

At this point my music education was mostly homespun, composed of my dad's songwriting and our family singing. I was not raised watching a lot of TV or listening to the radio or popular music. Once my dad saw I was serious about yodeling, he began teaching me about harmonies and exploring vocal control, but as much as anything, I was learning to be a professional. If I wanted to sing in the show, I knew I was expected to behave. No whining backstage. No pouting onstage. I was expected to smile and be polite, because this was our living and it deserved respect.

We were in some ways the ideal Mormon family, with family dinners and church, complete with a family act. But a different type of family act was playing out offstage. My parents fought a lot, their strained voices escalating to full-blown yelling behind closed doors and thin walls. And when they were not fighting, I often had the sense they were playacting. They seemed disconnected, hollow somehow, deeply withdrawn. There were hugs given to each other, and to their children, but tension crackled like a live wire until they announced their divorce.

I was eight. My brothers and I found ourselves enrolled in therapy classes that taught us about the finer points of divorce. We were talked to about why it was not our fault, and also clued in to different tactics parents might employ during this new phase of our lives. For instance, the Disneyland effect meant one parent might spoil the children to gain their favor. I didn't think there would be any risk of that here. Onstage, my brothers and I were learning the nuanced art of performing, while offstage we were receiving an adult-level education about divorce before we'd ever had a chance to learn about love or marriage.

I have no idea why it was my mom who stayed in the big house by herself, with all our empty rooms collecting dust, while my dad moved my brothers and me into a single spare room at a friend's house for a short stint. We lived like this until the contract for the dinner show was up at the Hilton in Anchorage.

The night I realized our family was to be forever broken is permanently emblazoned in my mind. It was around 11 at night. We had just completed our last set as a family at the hotel and were loaded up in our station wagon, which was packed full of all our belongings. My brothers and I sat in the very back, on blankets my dad had spread out with pillows to serve as a makeshift bed while he drove us six hours through the mountains to Homer, where we relocated that night. I remember a new strong emotion nearly suffocating me as I watched my mom through the rear window. She was still in her show clothes. Ruffled maroon shirt. A thick denim skirt. A long, curved rooster tail feather in her hair, lit by a single streetlamp that cast a sickly green hue. Her hand waving goodbye until she was out of sight.

My throat ached as I choked back tears. Shane mercifully told a joke, a dumb one, but we all used it as an excuse to laugh while tears ran down our faces. All of us laughing, grief masked by twisted smiles in the back, while my dad drove. I will always love Shane for giving us permission to cry the only way he knew

how.

My dad suddenly found himself a single father of three. No wife to help. We moved into a one-room house behind my uncle Otto's machine shop. I remember the smell of spark and metal and grease. My room was a narrow hallway closet. Dad built a narrow loft bed, complete with a ladder for me to climb, and my few clothes hung from the coat bar beneath it. I left the sliding accordion doors open when I slept, but enjoyed closing them during the day, making a neat fort of my closet-room. Dad built oddly shaped bunk beds in the triangular water closet for my brothers, with holes strategically placed so the water pipes could grow through the beds like metal trees. The first time my dad hit me was in this house. It felt like suddenly my whole life was submerged and I was living underwater. All his values seemed to change overnight. His actions ran in stark contrast to the sober Mormon family man I knew, and went against every tenet of our faith. We went from being a happy churchgoing Mormon family to being the estranged kids of an absent mother and a dad who was a drinking, smoking ladies' man.

Dad began dating another woman, and when she became pregnant, the church excommunicated him for having a child out of wedlock. They were on-again-off-again, but when they were on, we often stayed in her two-room trailer. I got the couch. They tried to make a go of it, and made it through the pregnancy. My dad was most nervous about how I would accept my new little brother, but he didn't need to be. I loved him instantly. He was like my own baby. I held him, dressed him, and loved him dearly. My dad sent me to a therapist again at this point to help me deal with any feelings I might have about it. I felt he should be in therapy, not me. I remember sitting on a brightly colored pillow across from the brightly dressed therapist with the brightly painted smile and telling her so. I said, "My dad is doing this to our life. I'm not. Why am I here?" Soon after Nikos's birth there was a bitter breakup, and I only got to see him rarely. I was able to maintain some contact with him for a few years and babysat him several times, but he eventually moved to Oregon, and I didn't see him again until I was twenty-one. I mourned the loss of my little brother and eventually wrote him a song called "Nikos." In later years, and after much healing for everyone involved, our families have had the opportunity to be close again.

three

you don't outrun pain

My dad had left behind his social work, and now we supported ourselves on music alone. I took my mom's place in the act, but we no longer performed in fancy hotels, singing instead in honky-tonks, juke joints, restaurants, lumberjack haunts, and veterans' bars. There was no more variety show for tourists; in these places we were required to do five-hour sets of covers and my dad's originals, supplying the background music while people ate and drank. I was probably the only fourth grader who went from elementary school straight to the bar. I was still adjusting to a new school on weekdays, and on weekends I transformed into a barroom curiosity. School politics and social graces were confusing, but onstage I was confident and secure—look at that cute girl yodel! Most gigs were local, but eventually we toured across the state, sometimes with a band, but mostly it was just my dad on guitar singing lead, me doing harmony. My dad was a great entertainer, personable and professional, and could not only play and sing thousands of cover songs but wrote originals as well.

I was learning harmonies to the classic songs and popular covers my dad included in our set lists. "Brown-Eyed Girl," "Heartbreak Hotel," "Free Fallin'," "Hotel California," "The Circle Game." I had never heard the Rolling Stones sing "Wild Horses" or the Beatles sing "Yesterday," only dad's acoustic interpretations. For the most part my musical influences were songs, not the artists. Singing five-hour sets every night of all the best songs ever written taught me about storytelling. I didn't see the cult of personality attached to the

songs, only the pure power of the words and stories. I never heard Elvis sing until I was in my late teens. I never heard Jim Croce sing . . . it goes on. I didn't have access to much pop culture. I do remember Odetta, Maria Callas, and *Ella Fitzgerald Sings the Cole Porter Songbook*. As I grew older and MTV was all powerful, I knew of Cyndi Lauper, although I didn't gravitate toward Madonna when she first came out. She was too far from my world. Nor did I get the Beatles at the time. It took me years to appreciate pop music. My dad was my biggest musical influence, and then as I grew up, I listened to old folk songs from Ireland and England. I listened to old blues artists—some obscure and some more well-known. My lack of music history has vexed me for much of my life. At the same time, I think having the silence in which to develop my own sound was priceless.

To develop my singing I spent hours alone. I wouldn't call it practicing as much as I would exploring. Experimenting and getting to know my voice and its limits, and how to push them. Later I learned more about tone and breath by listening to great singers. I was a good mimic and learned a lot by studying artists with specific colors. Nanci Griffith for her bright sweet ironic tone. Ella was an endless teacher for me, and still is. Sarah Vaughan is one of the finest voices in history—her tone almost operatic, and her breath control staggering.

I had no tape player or cassette tapes until I was a teenager, and TV and radio were just not habits we seemed to be into. I wrote my first song after learning about Martin Luther King Jr. in fourth grade. I was so touched by his life story it inspired me to write the lyrics for "I Have a Dream." It was not a long or lyrically complex song, though it had some interesting melodic choices for an eight-year-old.

I have a dream that people can be free

I have a dream that people can be friends

Ever since I was a little boy

I wished I could be free

Singing two nights a week and having a front-row view of the mating rituals of drunks and barmaids was another adult education in more ways than one. I have always had a poet's heart, and I felt honored somehow to watch unnoticed as people lived such raw lives in front of me. I memorized faces and characters that would fill short stories and songs for decades to come. There was one couple who were bitter drunks and fought all the time. I would sidle up to the bar once sparks started flying and eat maraschino cherries and eavesdrop as innocuously as I could. The man noticed me listening one evening, and said, "Making up is the best part, kid." The look on her face betrayed the fact that she did not agree. In her I saw anger, hurt. Her youth lost in a blur of drink and cigarette smoke. Deep wrinkles like road maps of heartbreak carved into her skin. Her face stuck with me for years and I finally wrote "Rosey and Mick," which ended up on my album *Perfectly Clear*.

So many characters and faces that will forever be engrained in my mind. The smell of stale beer and vomit as we did our sound checks before the doors opened. As I got older, my favorite places to sing were biker bars. The bikers were always protective and sweet toward me. When I was about twelve, playing at the Trade Winds biker bar in Anchorage, a man was outside foaming at the mouth, overdosing on PCP. Angel dust, I remember a woman whispering to me. When I saw the red lights flashing through the window, I set my mic down silently mid-song and walked from the stage to the bathroom so I wouldn't get kicked out for singing in there underage. I knew the routine. A couple of the biker men saw me do this and nodded to their women, who silently followed me to keep me company. The bathroom was long and narrow, and I remember the women coming in, drink making them warm and wordy. We sat on the toilets, the doors all flung open, and two sat on the sink counters, all of us looking at each other in the long mirror above the sinks. The stalls on

each side of me were occupied by women weathered and road weary, bleached blondes, brunettes, and one redhead, all wearing acid-washed jeans, tank tops, and leather jackets. Slight variances on the same theme. My stall in the middle, startling in contrast. A twelve-year-old wearing a long-sleeved shirt buttoned up to the very top button, showcasing a whimsical and heartbreakingly sweet pattern of kitty paw prints in beige. Long honey blonde hair straight as sticks tucked behind my ears, posture erect as I visited with the ladies, glad for their company.

The brunette on the sink wore fringed boots that hung off the edge of the counter. “You sing real nice, kid. Real nice.”

“Thanks,” I said, enjoying the compliment.

“You know, my old man is finally gonna make an honest woman of me. The son of a bitch,” she said, to several chuckles from the other stalls before she continued. “You guys should sing at our wedding.”

I knew not to accept gigs on my own, and so I said, “My dad handles all of our bookings, but I’m sure we would love to sing at your wedding.” In most bars I felt invisible, but it was always the bikers who kept an eye on me, sensing my vulnerability the way only other outcasts can. Bikers had their own code of ethics, which was palpable to me even at that age.

With time I learned to be street-smart and to trust my instincts elsewhere in barrooms. I had to. When I was about nine, a man in Alice’s Champagne Palace placed a dime in my hand, folding my small fingers around the cool silver, and said, “Call me when you’re sixteen.” Another time I was walking to the bathroom, and as a man passing by caught a quick glance of me, he said casually, “You’re going to be a great fuck when you’re older.” I learned to let my energy expand only on stage. Offstage and between sets I stayed small and drew little attention to myself. My dad made rounds and visited with patrons, and I would entertain myself by looking in a Michelob beer mirror, learning how to move each muscle in my face. In fifth-grade science class we were told about involuntary muscles, and how we couldn’t move them, so I set out to prove that wrong, starting with my lower eyelids. I mastered moving my ears in all directions, isolating my lower eyelids and each nostril separately, and each quarter of each lip independently.

I loved to observe people. I watched love and life play out in a million ways, but one of the best things I learned was this: You don’t outrun pain. I saw men and women in those barrooms all trying to outrun something, some pain in their life—and man, they had pain. Vets broken and drifting, abused women, abused boys who had grown up to be emotionally crippled men. I saw them all trying to bury that pain in booze, sex, drugs, anger, and I saw it all before I was able to indulge in many of those behaviors myself. I saw that no one outran their suffering; they only piled new pain upon their original pain. I saw the pain pile up into insurmountable mountains, and I saw the price people paid who buried all that pain, and along with it their hope, joy, and chance at happiness. All because they were trying to outrun the pain rather than walk through it and heal. I knew I was young, and that I’d already had more than my fair share of confusion and pain. I resolved at that time to never drink or do drugs, to try to find the courage to face myself as honestly as I could. I was keenly aware that numbing my feelings and instincts meant cutting myself off from the only real safety net I had. I knew I was vulnerable, I knew there were predators around me, and I also knew that my body came equipped with the most exquisite alarm system in the world—emotions and instincts—and that, for the most part, mine worked beautifully. I could tell in a second who felt safe and who did not. I learned to read people instantly.

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