

Aspiration

I was a resident of the Claymont Property in 1985. I was pregnant with my fourth child when the first inklings came to be of the idea of having a guitar seminar with Robert Fripp as the Instructor.

I had an acoustic guitar, a Guild. I tried to play the darn thing since I was 22 years old and now I was 35 and had not made much headway. I mentioned to my husband, Eric, that I would love to go on one of these courses, but under the circumstances, I was sure I would not qualify. I was, after all, already quite pregnant and I hadn't played my guitar in years. Without my knowing, Eric mentioned that I wanted to attend a course.

I was shopping one day in our little co-op. Robert often hung out there, doing correspondence and such, since he was the President of the Claymont Society of Continuous Education at that time. He approached me and said, "I understand that you would like to come on one of the guitar courses. I said that I did want to, but admitted that my guitar skills were not very good. I added, "I actually can't play an audible note!" He replied, "Not a deterrent." He gave me permission to attend either of the two courses that had been planned. I was so happy! I decided to go on the second of the first two courses held on the Claymont property.

The first two Guitar Craft courses began with the first one on March 25, 1985 and the second one on April 1, 1985. I chose to attend the second one because another resident, Suzy Hawes, was enrolled on that one and I wanted to be with another woman.

These course were kind of like one big course from the community side of it. The first Level I was held at the Claymont Mansion, a pre-civil war antebellum building. It had fallen into disrepair, but it had good bones. One of its many charms was that it had a ballroom, which was perfect for working with a large group of guitarists. The Claymont Mansion also had matching buildings on each side, which were originally slave quarters. One could sense the grandeur, as well as the dark past of a former age. I especially loved the walk in the overgrown formal gardens.

I was part of the workforce of the seminar committee. Although I was expecting a baby in 2 months, I was still getting around pretty well. I was cleaning rooms, making beds, cooking and getting paid \$3.25 an hour.

I was up at the Mansion during the first Level I one day during the course doing something for the course. I heard this music coming from the ballroom. It was beautiful! I did my task and looked around the dining room and the library. No one was around, so I wandered into the library to eavesdrop outside of the big sliding door that led to the ballroom from that room. At that door I just stood there and listened in amazement. The first Guitar Craft theme, Aspiration, was being played in the circle.

I was mesmerized. It was one of those conscious moments one never forgets in life, when you know that your life is about to change forever. I felt such a longing. I wanted to be in that room and on this course. I couldn't wait until my Level I began.

Broken String

My Level I was held at the Great Barn and it was a different story. The initial opening circle was set up in the dining room, which needed tables & benches to be moved each time we met. It was a big production for the kitchen team. There were difficulties with re-arranging the dining room for each circle and then bringing it back to its original use, but the kitchen team of Claymont residents seemed to make it happen without apparent complaint.

Here we were, Suzy and I, surrounded by men. Strangers who had long mullets and cool guitars and lots of chops. I was a young mother with Nikolas, my four year old, and quite pregnant with Alia, who was due in May. But I felt awkward and out of place for another reason.

I didn't know anything about music really. I strummed chords and sang folk songs. I certainly didn't know what a triad was or a minor third. I had heard of a scale called C major, but it didn't seem very important to my life at the time. Until I got to Guitar Craft.

My first course brought me to value C major. I "discovered" it and it was a revelation! I loved the sound of it and thought it was really fun to play. I was like a child in the sandbox. The responsibilities of motherhood were temporarily lightened. I was given a chance to play.

In that first meeting in the circle in the dining room of the Barn, Robert instructed us to "tune our guitars to the following": C-G-D-A-E-G. An A was struck on a tuning fork. Everyone began adjusting their strings and tuning. I was already terrified. I barely could manage E Standard Tuning.

My Guild guitar was having a hard time, too. While everyone else seemed satisfied with their tuning attempt, the third string on my guitar was reluctant to be tuned up to the A. I looked at Robert from across the circle with a gesture of "What do I do now?" He sat there unmoving.

And so the string broke. Ahhh! Panic. The circle sat, silent. No one moved. The only thing to do was to get up, move as quickly as possible in my largish state, and waddle back to the other end of the Barn. I had a small room as a base for the course, but it was at the opposite end of two long corridors on the second floor, just before one reaches the Octagon. I changed my string, and slunk back. It was the longest five minutes of my life.

I entered the dining room again and there was the circle and everyone was waiting. No one appeared to have moved during this time. I found my seat and we were given a circulation.

“Choose one note. When you have a relationship with that note, pass it to the person on your left.”

It was an unusual musical experience. It wasn't exactly music as I knew it. It was sound. It was relationship to sound. My relationship to sound. It became personal. It was mine. Music became something that I could develop a relationship to. My life changed in that moment, too.

I was shaken from my shame of the broken string, which I unfortunately took to be my fault. But I could feel the patience of the instructor who seemed to allow that mistake. It was really the inability of the guitar to hold the tension. But it was a metaphor for my own state, and my fear and inner judgement.

Through the circulation, something changed. I began to relax. It didn't matter that my string broke. An incredible orchestral sound was resonating in the ordinary confines of the dining room. I felt blessed. Here was a kind person. A strict disciplinarian, but still a kind man. And he was willing to teach me. And I was willing to listen and learn.