

Who are They?

... the inside “scoop” on some of your favorite local writers

All Fables Have Wings - Gary “Spyder” Lewis “Spyder’s Story According to Spyder”

By Pat Edwards

“Every form of refuge has its price.” Quoting from a lyric from the Eagles’ 1975 hit, “Lyn’ Eyes,” Gary L. Lewis, aka “Spyder,” described his 58 years of “heartaches and good things, too.”

Gary was born near Coeur d’Alene, Idaho where his father worked as a welder in the Bunker Hill zinc mine. While Gary was a small child, the family moved to Coos Bay, Oregon.

Early on, Gary was a huge Elvis Presley fan. Music – or rather, rhythm – had always been a part of his soul. By the time he was in the 6th grade, he was forming his lists of spelling words into a rhythmic beat. He dreamed of playing the guitar, but in his head, he heard the beat of the music rather than the melody, so a set of drums became his instrument of choice. In the 8th grade, Gary and his friend, Jim, began “dinkin’ around” in the music room on their lunch break. Gary played his drums and Jim, the saxophone. Soon, classmates began to gather to listen to their music and others joined them and they formed their own rock ‘n roll band called “Logical Conclusion.” By the age of 13, Gary had written his very first song entitled “The Last Trip to Boston.”

Music took over his life. Soon, he was doing gigs with a new band with a different mix of members called “Hate’s Brother.” They named it after one of their band members, Jeff Haight, deliberately misspelling his name. As the lead guitarist, Jeff developed a flashy gimmick of spewing lighter fluid from his mouth onto a lighted flame during their wildest and craziest songs – long before Kiss and other rockers did the same.

During that time, Gary and Jeff began to experiment with drugs and alcohol. It was a pattern that followed Gary throughout his career as a musician and songwriter and for Jeff, it ended his life in an overdose. According to Gary, there’s a huge “not so hidden” underbelly to the entertainment industry – especially rock music. He estimated that 90% of those who were involved in the industry used drugs, and “the other 10% were liars.”

Gary wrote a lot of song lyrics in those days. When asked if he wrote them as a melody formed in his head, he said, “no.” The lyrics came to him as a rhythmic beat just as the spelling words had done in the 6th grade. They didn’t always rhyme and sometimes seemed disjointed, but they came from his own special rhythm. The melody came later when the rest of the band worked their music around them.

Gary hired an agent and eventually, some of the songs he helped write were recorded by the various bands he was with and added to playlists of local radio stations. In



Gary Lewis on the drums

1972, while Gary was with the band, Chisom, 2,000 copies of one record called “Give Me What You Got,” were released by Northwest Incorporated Records of Portland, Oregon. The flipside of the record was another song with Gary’s lyrics, “Little Boy.”

While touring, the band traveled in two converted 1951 Cadillac hearses with the band’s name painted on the side. One towed a homemade travel trailer and they conversed back and forth between the cars with walkie talkies.

In 1973, Gary began playing the chain nightclub circuit in Nevada with his band at the time. They began a series of appearances in the Pilgrimage nightclubs going from Lake Tahoe, to Reno, Winnemucca, Las Vegas and ending in Laughlin. Then they reversed the order, playing the same cities in the Fireside clubs. “Since we only worked nine months out of the year, the summers were mine.” This became Gary’s life for the next three years. He describes life on the road as, appropriately, “rhythmic... We always knew what time and where our destiny would take us.”

In 1977, Gary joined a group of gay female entertainers called “Ganhna” as a backup musician. There was also an Elvis impersonator by the name of Jimmy Ball who toured with them. Gary was offered and accepted a contract for \$25,000 plus 10% of the gate and included the cutting of a record and a four-month tour with the group.

After the contract expired, he bought a ‘53 three-panehead Harley-Davidson and had it “fixed up with eight coats of gloss black paint.” Gary had a large metallic gold black widow spider painted on the gas tank and his nickname, “Spyder,” was born. His riding companion was a Native American woman named Sherry Longtree, and they

traveled around the Northwest where Gary began playing impromptu gigs. In the early 1980s, when they learned that Sherry was going to have a baby, they settled down in the small town of Vernonia, Oregon. During that time, Gary became clean and sober and he took a job with the railroad. Tragedy struck, though, and Sherry and their unborn baby were killed in a car accident on an icy road.

Gary's life spiraled downward as, according to him, he "went off the deep end." He sold his Harley and went back heavily into drugs. "I was on a one-way street to nowhere, becoming a poor Howard Hughes." After watching him live as a meth-addicted recluse, Gary's parents and a long-time friend interceded. In 1986, they took him to Serenity Lane in Eugene where he stayed for 60 days, getting much-needed counseling and drying the drugs out of his system.

It's been a long road back for Gary, but he hasn't touched drugs or alcohol since.

"I very much miss the road. On-stage, there is something to be said about the spotlight. You can't see past the first three rows, but the wild crowd says it all. Your relationship with your fans is the life-blood of an entertainer. It's the rush of the crowd, the music and the people you meet. It's the ride of your life on the wings of a song."

Gary eventually settled down in the Cottage Grove area. He now lives with his fiancé, Linda, whom he met nine years ago through a dating service. "We're still putting up with each other. She's a down-home, out-going person – loves animals and even me." Gary, Linda, and a mutual friend have become interested in crafts and they designed and merchandised decorative lighted garden stones which have become popular in the area.

Gary has been retired from the music business for many years now, but his song lyrics live on. He's interested in putting them to music and would like to find a collaborator who would like to work with him. He's shared many of his lyrics with the readers of *Groundwaters* and hopes to put them all into a book someday... in fact, there's a whole Rubbermaid tub full of them. According to Gary, for him, one of them called "All Fables, They Have Wings" says it all.



(back) Dennis Tennet, rhythm guitar; Darryl Tennet, lead singer; Craig Collman, keyboard & saxophone. (front) Gary Lewis, drums; Roger Duvall, bass guitar. (Missing from picture, Mike Anderson, Jeff Haight's replacement)



All Fables, They Have Wings

A feeling free, somewhat low-keyed
Scroll of melodies

All fables, they have been labeled
All fables, they have wings.

Distant dreamers by the dozen
Call it loyalty unspent
As a multitude of schemers do or die
Will not dissent.

Until the war is over
Until the smoke has cleared
Then we'll count the four-leaf clover
When destiny is here.

When the strongest of survivors
Is the owner of his soul
Dead and gone, the eight-till-fivers
The rulers rock and roll.

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~ Spyder



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