



Excerpted from Chapter 4 of BACKSTAGE Nashville

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Nashville

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Even in first grade, school was a tortured existence for me. Bullying was a term that was not yet employed, but as scrawny as I was, when it came to torment, I was the wide receiver.

Helping matters none was the fact that the Warner family was a close and expanded assembly, and as such, owned much of, or were involved in, a lot of the town's properties and what little politics there were. And for that, I was viewed as a stuck-up rich kid. In fact, I was neither. Yes, for the area, my family had done okay, but while I have learned to mask it when required, I was and remain extremely shy and uneasy around crowds of any kind. This made the bullseye even bigger.

By this time, I had my first real guitar, and getting home from school and hiding behind it was my sanctuary and my sanity. I remember well the day that my mom came to pick me up from school early because the guitar had arrived at the Sears and Roebuck catalogue store. At twenty miles and thirty minutes away, Newport was the nearest town for shopping, and the ride to pick up my prize seemed to last an eternity. But it was worth it. Stained with a starburst finish, this thing of beauty was to my young eyes a method of transport, an instrument of escape. It was almost like dad's, and it was mine.

It wasn't long before there was an eight-year-old boy, with messy hair and a few freckles around his nose, standing in the back of his dad's stage with that prize guitar, strumming a few chords to Johnny Cash's A Ring of Fire during those Saturday night gigs. I was nervous and shy but excited, and I would strum for all I was worth until my young eyelids grew weightier than my enthusiasm. Then it would be time to join my sister and brother on the floor next to the empty instrument cases. We would fall asleep to the rhythm until the last waltz was played and we were loaded into the car.

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