

Recording My Songs

After a drunk driver hit me with his car, I wore a cast on my left leg from my hip to my toes and dealt with other injuries. I traveled on crutches, but it wasn't as easy as walking had been. I didn't get out much for a while.

I decided to learn to play guitar and sing while I worked to heal. I bought a cheap guitar. I started learning what I could without lessons, without much education in music, without consistency in my practice. I wanted to learn, but I was often more interested in other things that used my time.

Then my brother, David, bought a Gibson Hummingbird guitar at an estate sale for a very low price, tried it for a while, and decided he wasn't interested in learning to play guitar. He passed the guitar and the low price on to me, and I owned an exceptionally good guitar.

I gave my first guitar to a friend and practiced more than I had, but still not as much as I would have if I had put learning music as my first priority.

Norman volunteered to teach me to play. He said, "Do this, and this, and this." He moved the fingers of his left hand like a fast spider around the fret board while he picked a complex rhythm with his right hand. I appreciated his music, but I knew if I learned more about playing guitar, I'd learn it without his help. Financial limitations kept me from finding a teacher who charged for lessons, and no one besides Norman volunteered to teach me.

I got free of the cast, and I began again to make my way more actively in the world. I learned and practiced music even less as I resumed more outdoor activity.

But now that I had a good guitar and knew a few chords, songs came to my thoughts, or lines that needed to be expanded

into songs came to me. I wrote down words and chords, added to suggested lines, sang and played my new songs until I knew them well enough to perform them again and then resumed outdoor activities.

Years went by, and life progressed through many changes. Sporadically, I practiced my songs and a few by other people. I practiced a half-hour or an hour a day for a few days, until my garden or my job or teaching my daughters or something else demanded my time.

As years passed, I created more than a hundred songs I liked well enough to keep.

Leiza and Tom visited recently. They asked me to perform some of my songs and expressed enthusiasm about the songs I sang for them, though I thought my performances were rough and barely showed the songs' potentials.

After they left, I thought, *I've said I'm going to record my songs and try to find final form for them. If I'm going to do that, it's time.*

I bought a microphone and an audio interface and speakers and used my computer to record songs. I listened to the recordings. Hearing my songs reproduced with every failure to achieve what I aimed for asked me to define and focus on what I needed to learn. I set to work.

I practice playing my guitar, singing, and whistling. Some days, I record songs and play back the recordings. Occasionally, I decide a song is a good performance, for now, and I save it and practice other songs.

I write through-composed songs, sometimes with rhyme and sometimes without, sometimes with a chorus, but usually not after every stanza, when I use stanzas. Some listeners have called me a singing poet, meaning, I think, that, according to their perception, my words take precedence over musical structure.

Some listeners say my songs lack musical structure. I think

they mean my songs lack standard musical structure. Most of them are not tightly in a form many listeners expect of a song. I vary the structure between performances because I haven't fully decided what I want the structure to be and because I don't have full control over what I do with my guitar and my voice. For me, creativity seems to come with some flex.

I practice to make unfamiliar structure more evident. I try to perform what I heard when the songs or parts of the songs first came into my thoughts. I practice to achieve something more complex, more controlled than I can yet perform. I learn.

I sent recordings of some of my songs to friends and relatives. I hear support and approval from some. From some, I hear something like, "What is this? It's different from what I'm accustomed to, and I don't know what to think about it." I hear strong disapproval from a few. I hear nothing at all from some. Sometimes I speculate about what lack of response might mean. At my most confident, I don't speculate. All the responses I get or don't get are okay and approximately match my own changing spectrum of thoughts about my music.

I build new songs. I write essays, poetry, and fiction. I helped a neighbor repair her house. I practice playing my guitar. I sing and whistle. I built and I maintain a website featuring my creative work. I live.

I continue to record songs, to celebrate what I know so far, to help me hear what I still need to learn about my songs, about music, about existence. Careful, practiced creativity demonstrates my growing understanding. Sometimes, I share songs I've recorded, not as "Here is perfection, a finished form," but as. "Here is a step along the way, performed well enough that I think it demonstrates the song, and I share the joy of creativity with you along the way."

I joyfully express my life to the universe. I express gratitude for creativity, for my life, for all life, for the universe. I sing. I whistle. I play my guitar. I learn more about accurately

recording music.

Sometimes, I put a song I've recorded on my website. Every song I put on my website is with the promise that I will replace it when I record a better performance. It is ongoing work.