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My Life As A Guitar

"It seems like years since I last felt the warm hello of the sun..."

Jimi Hendrix

The idle days that stretch behind me seem as numerous as the stars in the sky on an endless night. I peer down from my resting place and gaze through the dusty windows of Barney's Pawn Shop, which has been my home for the last 5 years. On 15th Street outside I can see a bustling mass of people moving to and fro in a never ending procession. This is the whole of my existence. I am a 1961 Fender Stratocaster electric guitar with candy apple red paint. My body has many dents and dings, each one telling the story of a misfortunate incident from my past. I am not in bad shape though, one might even say that I am a classic or vintage instrument. This is of little consolation however, I only wish someone would buy me and make music with me again. I wait until I don't think I can wait any longer, and then, I wait some more.

In the Spring of 1961, I was on display in the front window of Max's Music in Chicago, Illinois. I was young then. My paint was lustrous and shone like glass. My frets were unworn and my body and neck straight, without any signs of neglect. It was early in April on a bright, warm Saturday morning when John Armstrong walked up to the store and saw me on display. John was a dark skinned man of about 35 years, with a deep, gravelly voice. He was the leader of a local

Blues band called "Johny James and the Blue Flames". John walked past my window on his way to the entrance of the store. Something, perhaps a ray of sunlight reflecting off of my brilliant sheen, caught his eye. He stopped momentarily, then walked slowly back to look at me in all of my glory. I must admit I was a looker in those days. He stood there for a moment or two, and then went into the store, called the clerk, and had me plugged in for a test run.

I'll never forget that first time John played me. His hands were strong and sure. It seemed as if I had been built for him, and him alone. He played me for about an hour, going over some sweet old Blues tunes, switching my pick-ups, and turning my knobs until he got just the right sound. When he seemed satisfied with my tone, he went to the clerk, and after some haggling over my price, agreed to buy me for \$350 dollars.

The eight years that I spent with John were the happiest days of my life. We played out every weekend at various clubs, and I was the star of the show. The audience crowded by the stage to watch, and during solos, all eyes were on me. The other instruments seemed to be envious of all the attention I got. On a road trip to New York in 1967 John engraved his initials in the back of my head stock. Though it hurt for a minute, I was proud that he would think so highly of me as to do so.

John came into difficulties in the Autumn of 1969 due to the fact that his mother had taken ill, and he had to sell me. It was a Wednesday

evening in late September 1969 when John and I parted. I will always remember that night as the saddest of my life. The man came to the door, acknowledged that he was Mark, the one who had called about the ad in the classifieds, and John let him in. Mark was a tall man about 50 years old, with grey thinning hair, and thick glasses. He told John that he was looking for a guitar for his son Paul's fourteenth birthday, and that a friend had recommended Fender as being a good make. John agreed and took me out of my case, plugged me in, and we began going through some of our repertoire.

Mark was so taken by the beautiful sound that John and I made together that he soon agreed to pay the \$250 John was asking for me, without even arguing over the price. As Mark was leaving with me, John said to him, "That guitar meant a lot to me, be sure to take good care of it now".

Mark, his wife Paula, and their son Paul lived in the suburbs, in a quiet residential neighborhood. I was given to Paul as promised on his fourteenth birthday. Paul seemed very excited to have me, a real electric guitar, in his possession. He decided to practice everyday until he was able to play in a rock band, which was his goal in life. Paul played me everyday for two months, and then started to lose interest in me. I ended up in the back of his closet covered in dirty clothes. There I remained for the better part of four years until the Summer of 1973, I

was sold to one of Paul's friends for \$50 and two grams of marijuana.

Martin Simpson was eighteen years old. He was a tall, slender kid with greasy hair and a love for loud rock music. He was definitely not the best guitar player in the world, but at least I was being played, and my two broken strings had been replaced. Martin was a careless person and I was often left laying around his room where I would get kicked over, or knocked into every so often. Usually on Friday nights Martin practiced with his Rock band "Gypsy Rose", a ragtag bunch of kids that could never seem to find a steady drummer. They were always out of tune or off time, and they never seemed able to complete an entire song without stopping in the middle for some reason or another.

Martin owned me until the Winter of 1982 when his house was robbed and I was stolen along with a television set, and a jewelry box. I rode around in the trunk of a car for what seemed to be about two days, and when my case was finally opened again I was in the presence of one Vic Spade, the guitar player for a band known as the Victimizers.

Vic was a short, stout guy with a tatoo of a skull on his right arm, and that of a Dragon on his left. His hair was a kind of yellow-green color, and his skin was very pale. It seemed like Vic only knew three chords, and all of the Victimizers' songs were variations of those same chords sped up to ninety miles an hour. Of all the people who have

owned me, Vic Spade was the most abusive. He kicked me around, smashed me up against amplifiers, put stickers all over my once lustrous finish, and hardly ever put me in my case. I lived this pathetic existence for six years until Vic died of a heroin overdose one sunny afternoon in March 1988, and I was sold by his girlfriend to Barney's Pawn Shop for \$100.

Old Barney is a nice enough guy. He scraped all of Vic's stickers off of me the best he could, restrung me, and put me up for sale. My asking price at first was \$300, but when no one seemed interested in me, he dropped it to \$250. After a year I was moved to the back of the store to make way for some newer models, and here I have been ever since.

The highlight of my life is the occasional tinkling sound of the bells that hang on the entrance door. Whenever I hear the bells sounding I get a little apprehensive and try to look my best. I still haven't lost all hope of finding a new home.

Today has been like any other day. A few people came in, browsed around, and left without buying anything. It's six o'clock now, almost closing time. I guess no one else will come in tonight. Wait, I think I hear the bells on the door. Yes someone is coming in. I can't see what they look like, but they are asking about Fender Stratocasters. Hey that voice sounds kind of familiar. ...No it couldn't be... It sounds

like John Armstrong my original owner...That's impossible though, it couldn't be... but it is... It's John! "Hey John it's me your old guitar, I'm back here! John, back here!"

Barney is showing him all the newer models in the front of the store, but John is telling him that he is looking for an older model like the one he used to have years ago. Of course he is! He's talking about me! "John I'm back here. in the back! Come back Here!"

Barney leads him to the back, to where the older models are, to where I have been hanging for four long years. He's reaching up to get me! John's mouth drops open, "It couldn't be", he says, as he gently lifts me from my rack.

"It's me John. Look on the back of my head stock where you carved your initials. It's me!" John slowly turns me around and there they are, J.A., just where he remembered them to be.

" I don't believe it", he says to Barney. "This is my old guitar. I bought her when she was brand new in 1961, and had to sell her twenty five years ago. I've been looking all over for a guitar like her. I never thought I would find the exact same guitar. I'll take her and you can bet I won't part with her again".