

# Chapter One

## FOREVER YOUNG

“Astrid! Hey, Astrid!”

I’m wandering the colonnade of Shoreline Amphitheatre at a Bridge School show when I hear my name. I turn and see a man coming towards me, hand outstretched. I don’t recognize him, but that’s not unusual. I meet a lot of people, many of whom recede in my memory without further recall. I grin and offer my hand, figuring that after a moment I’ll be able to figure out how I know him.

“It’s great to see you again!” he enthuses.

“Sure,” I say, waiting for the moment when I will know who he is.

“Is Bob here?” he asks, an innocent enough question.

“No, not this year.”

“I hear you’re living in Napa Valley now.”

“Yes, that’s right.” I’m suddenly starting to think that maybe I don’t know this guy. “What did you say your name is?”

“Are Neil and your dad still on the outs? Why didn’t your dad come to the Hall of Fame induction?”

By this time, I’m walking. Fast. He’s still talking away, nattering about this and that, pieces of my personal life. My *family’s* personal life. It’s creepy as hell.

I lose him at the backstage gate, which clicks impenetra-

bly behind me, an opaque wall to silence the voice that's been following me all my life. It echoes with each footfall as I put distance between us, and like dominoes, it connects a winding path from that moment to so many that went before, back to younger days when my high school classmates used to say "How's Neil?" when they saw me, and never mind how I was doing.

Welcome to my world.

I've never been able to come up with a clever answer to the question I am still asked on an almost daily basis:

What's it like to be Neil Young's sister?

Our father, Scott Young, wrote about Neil in his book *Neil and Me*. I have to admit, I didn't give it much more than a quick read at the time. I was far more into sci-fi, the multi-layered quasi-realities of Philip K. Dick and Isaac Asimov. My dad was way too real, way too down to earth for that. He wrote like he would have told the story aloud.

Am I, also, a writer in that way?

Not really.

So then, is it strange that I am picking up one of his loose threads just where he left off?

Hm, possibly.

Could it be that I've decided after all these years that it's okay to be related to Neil Young?

If you knew me, you'd know the answer to that one. After all, he is truly rock and roll royalty, which makes me, I suppose, a princess of sorts.

I think that this book, while covering a great deal of karmic ground that has nothing to do with my brother, will also help me see him—and our family—more clearly. I don't really know what it's like to have a family that would be considered "normal"—a regular old dyed-in-the-wool bunch of Canadian folks, a family that didn't make the news, the trades, or the Hall of Fame.



**Astrid as a baby with her mother**

Kids never know what they have or don't have until they look at other kids. My friends and school chums weren't any different from me, neither were their houses, their neighborhoods, their parents' cars, their summer camps. What was different was that when my parents had dinner parties, all the boys on the street would be hovering around our front yard, waiting for the hockey players to come out. And they were all there, let me tell you. That is part of what clued me in. The rest came later ...

Being Young, in the sense that we are all that—Youngs—was probably easier for me than it was for Neil, or our older brother Bob. Neil has often told me that I saw a different side of our father, a side that was decidedly more content and settled. Dad was established in his career by the time I came

along, and the transient aspect of his life was behind him in many ways. He still traveled, with the news, towards the news. He had an eye for natural beauty and was passionate about cultures, nature, and personalities, and he gravitated to these things without much forethought. When there was no particular story in evidence, he would find one. He had a way of making you care about things he cared about. These things were not obscure but existed just beneath the layers of what we can see if we take the time to look. He could make a compelling story about anything: the apples in the fall, a dying wetland, a duck with a broken wing, a clumsy cat, or a beloved moment. He taught me to see the immediacy of beauty and love, and to honor those things that make us smile, no matter how insignificant they seem.

My father and Neil never shared these things. My father was a struggling writer through Bob's and Neil's early years, and they only really got to experience his successes after their family had splintered. When my father and Neil's mother split up, things happened. Neil moved to Winnipeg, which, I think, was a sort of kismet. I wonder if things would have been the same had he stayed in Toronto with Dad, and if Bob had gone to Winnipeg with his mother. Of course, we'll never know.

I think our very early childhoods, in some ways, gave us similar memories of our father. He made up and sang silly songs for us, and was a devoted family man, ever close to his brother Bob and sister Dorothy. He would make a spaghetti dinner seem like haute cuisine. Whether we were in a roadside motel or a beachfront house, wherever we were, it was exactly the center of the universe. We spent endless hours in the car, driving to Florida, driving to Flin Flon. I was there, and Neil was too, though not in the same decade, and probably in a different car. The more things change, the more things stay the same.

Asking me what it's like being Neil's sister is kind of a



**From left to right: Brother Bob, our Grandfather Percy Young, and Neil; girls are from left to right Stephanie, Marny and Penny Young, our Uncle Bob's girls, aka the 'girl cousins' in Omeme**

roundabout way of asking what it's like to be Scott's kid. Everything that Neil is, or has become, is very directly attributable to genetics. Our father is the common thread that so much of our existence is linked to, and he's an important element, one I can't ignore. Plus, I've got to start somewhere.

As I write this book, I'm hoping to enlighten myself about who this Neil Young guy is. As well as I know him in ways that I can't explain, there's still a fair bit of mystery to explore. I suppose I'm as avid and interested as any reader might be, but to a more selfish end. I am seeking to discover

a family: one that has never run from itself, one that, inevitably, comes together to identify and comfort, with the knowledge that there is no question that we are connected.

What I don't want to do is cover material that's been written about a million times before in a million ways. I figure that if you're such a big fan, you'll know that stuff already. I'm not one for redundancy—at least I aspire not to be redundant—and that should give you some insight into who I am, right off the truck. Everybody knows certain truths about us, about Omemee, about Winnipeg, about Toronto, about Blind River and Fort William. In fact, you probably know more about those days than I do, because I wasn't there, and I only sort of read Dad's book. My focus is more on what I know, or have come to know, about our family: our lives seen through my eyes, what it's like to be us.

First, to briefly dispel some common myths: my brother's name is Neil Percival Young, not Kenneth, not Ragland. *Bob's* middle name is Ragland, actually: Robert Ragland Young. They were both born in Toronto. Omemee is *not* in North Ontario; it's more South actually, about seventy-five miles north east of Toronto. That's not quite as poetic, I know. So was "Helpless" really about Fort William?

Neil *did* play *The Riverboat* in Yorkville; I saw him there when I was a wee child, and I remember it vividly. I am Neil's *half* sister—not stepsister, not daughter—on our father's side. My sister Deirdre, eleven years my senior, is actually my half sister from our mother's first marriage. My father adopted her when she was nine.

My father left Neil and Bob's mother for my mother in 1961. Bob was about eighteen, Neil was about fourteen. My father and my mother split when I was about twelve.

Our father was a leaver.

We all have that wanderlust, and I attribute that to our dad and his frequent occasions to drive long and far with family

in tow. We didn't take the train; we mostly didn't fly unless it was really too far or over the sea. As children, we saw much of the continent from the backseat of Dad's Chrysler. It's a pretty good memory to have. Like most families, we'd play road games. Dad would sing songs he'd made up, mostly sung to recognizable tunes like "God Save The Queen" and "The Maple Leaf Forever"—he wasn't much for finding his own melodies, but the lyric was always funny:

"In days of yore, from Britain's shore  
Wolfe the hungry hero came  
And planted firm the Chinese flag  
And ordered up some chow mein  
With chicken fried rice and mushrooms too  
He forgot the sweet-and-sour  
But after he burped, he said aloud:  
'This is Britain's finest hour!'"  
(to the tune of "The Maple Leaf Forever")

And then there were songs about our horse

"God save our noble horse  
We speak of Tom of course  
Long may he neck-rein."  
(to "God Save the Queen")

You get the picture...Neil recently revealed one of his own such memories in "Far From Home," a song from *Prairie Wind*.

That's really how it was. Uncle Bob could play anything on the piano, mostly in the key of F-sharp (all the black ones) but man, could he boogie! He got it from his mother, my Granny Jean, who was a late-night piano player and reveler—much like the rest of us became; everyone has a birthright, it

has to come from somewhere! The music is in all of us. According to my father's sister, Dorothy, Jean would play the piano at the Legion hall every Saturday night, playing everything from "Pack up Your Troubles" to "Bicycle Built for Two" on demand.

"Play a song from the war," a man called out one night.

"Which war?" Jean asked. "Dubya dubya one or the Boer War?"

When nobody was singing along, she'd go on home.

That sounds familiar. Music is in us all, though I've often in the past said otherwise.

I heard the song "Far From Home" for the first time at our father's memorial service when Neil and Pegi sang it, and I thought about how we weren't so different from each other. Some things were the same for both of us; they just happened at different times.

Dad passed from this world exactly a week before Father's Day, 2005, but he'd been taken from us long before, by dementia. He'd had a series of strokes in 1997, and from there, made a slow decline. His contribution to conversations, his witticisms, his out-loud love of home and family faded gently over the years, but in a sense his illness brought us together as a real, bona fide family unit for the first time in what seemed like ever. I think it was a new situation for all of us as we'd scattered to the wind the moment an opportunity arose. We'd all carved out our own families of a sort, and we weren't accustomed to being together, at least, not since the dawn of our memories. It had been a long time.

In 1997, I was living in Los Angeles and called Dad just to say hi. He sounded strange, a little disoriented, and was slurring his speech a bit.

"I had an episode," he said. "A series of small strokes."

Naturally, I was...how can I describe it? Alarmed doesn't exactly nail it. Well, for want of a better word, I flipped.



**Scott Young**

My thoughts ran from alarm to intense guilt at being away for so long, at not being as connected as I should have been, at not being there for him when he needed me. Here was what I thought was a major collapse for our father, and somehow no Youngs were by his side.

I promptly sold everything I owned and decided to move

back to Canada, the place I thought I'd never live again, but our father was in crisis. If this one rather major "episode" had taken him from us, what then? There were still so many things I needed to say to him, to do with him. I wasn't going to let him leave this world without knowing the person I'd become. I wanted him to see that I was okay, largely because of that part of me that was inexorably Young, a good-natured survivor of his wanderlust, benefitting from his devoted love, and his fiercely held belief that if you do the right thing and are true to yourself, anything is possible.

I packed a vanload of my antiques, drove it down to a dealer, and unloaded the whole lot in one go. It took eight weeks of garage sales to get rid of the rest: funny how after hordes of folks pick through your stuff, you end up not even wanting to touch what they leave behind ... it all ended up in a couple of boxes marked "FREE" beside the dumpster.

I turned over my apartment to my then-roommate, Mark Harvey. We'd been friends since he was the studio manager at A&M Studios in Hollywood. He'd helped me immensely to realize my musical goals by giving me free studio time and hooking me up with a right of first refusal deal with A&M Records. He'd gone through a bad patch with drugs and illness, left the studio, and subsequently contracted HIV. I'd found him in a transient hotel in Hollywood, picked him up on New Year's Day, and let him recover in my back bedroom. Slowly and surely, he got better, eventually starting on what was at the time a new and promising drug therapy.

When I had made my decision to go, Mark allowed me to segue out of my life. He took over my Glendale flat and my job as studio manager at Mad Dog Studios in Burbank. I felt that I was able to give him back some dignity in his final years and in return, I was free to leave Los Angeles behind and go to my father. That was a priceless gift I will always thank him for.

At that time my father was not completely out of sorts, but there were big changes. He was having trouble writing, which was very frustrating to him. He had moments of anger and bitterness, I suspect due to depression because of the changes in his life. He couldn't get his thoughts onto the page, couldn't hang onto the threads of stories that had enticed him to sit at the keyboard and work as he had early every morning for most of his life. He seemed to sleep more than usual and would bow out of the room if he started to become disoriented with the company or conversation. He would often speak to me as though I were my mother, whose name was Astrid as well. Sometimes he would call me by my sister's name, Deirdre, or at times my aunt's, Dorothy. He could carry on a conversation, but we had to stay in the moment rather than open up a discussion about this or that, even what he'd done earlier that day or what book he was reading. I could see the frustration in his face as he struggled to answer simple questions.

Then again, some days it was as if nothing at all was the matter. I don't think my siblings saw the change, at least for the first few years. They didn't spend as much time with him. They lived too far away. Deirdre lives near Iron Bridge, outside Sault Ste. Marie, with her husband, Brian, and their three children. Bob was in Florida at the time, golfing; Neil was in California, or Hawaii, or on the road. His visits were few, but regular, taken as side-trips from Michigan or New York, or during a stopover on the road.

I put the word out in no uncertain terms: it was time to spend time with our father. Over the years, we'd all become quite comfortable with our wandering ways and the infrequent but invigorating reunions either in Ontario or elsewhere on the road. It was our legacy, to travel, to be far from each other, and yet to know that the family was as solid in our love for each other as any "close" family could be. Of course, you

never think you're going to lose your parents like that, especially a man like our dad. He was so hale, so healthy all of the time, so vigorous. My memories of him consist of days filled with chopping wood, hauling bales of hay, building fences, walking through our woods in all seasons, knowing every tree and mushroom along the way. This was our father, the intrepid wanderer, the live-forever type. He was rarely sick. He never complained, or at least if he did, I hardly ever heard him do it.

And so, on their initially brief visits, my siblings never saw it in the beginning. Bob was sure it was a conspiracy: Dad seemed fine to him. Deirdre was more concerned with Margaret's (my father's wife's) efforts to protect Dad from stress. Kids stressed him out a lot in the later years, and Deirdre had a few kids, so therefore it was not the best idea to be around Dad with a bunch of them. She felt excluded, having to schedule visits when it was "convenient." There were a few battles, and some sides taken. It wasn't easy for me to reconcile the changes either, but one adapts over time. I made a concerted effort as well and was not willing to let my feelings be hurt to the extent that it would affect my ability to be there for Dad.

When I'd found a new apartment in Toronto and was collecting furniture to use, Dad offered a couple of bookshelves and a lamp that were in the basement, so I took them—only to have them recalled by Margaret. They were hers, and of course, Dad didn't know what he was doing when he gave them to me. Things like that can easily be misinterpreted. How frustrating it must be to suddenly have to baby-sit a grown man so he doesn't give away all your stuff, or drive off in your car, or forget to eat. It was a challenge for Margaret especially. Almost twenty years Dad's junior, she surely never expected to become his full-time caregiver. It was the business end of "for better or for worse," for sure.



**Astrid's parents, Astrid and Scott, in the 1960s**

Margaret did tell me a funny story, though, about one particular visit that Neil and his elder son, Zeke, paid to Dad:

In his later years, it was sometimes difficult to convince Dad that he needed to bathe or shave. In that phase of the disease, the man is more like a child, though bigger, and more likely to get his way just through sheer weight resistance. Trying to get Dad ready for the visit, Margaret had wanted him to shave, but it just wasn't going to happen. Then in walked Neil and Zeke, fresh from the road, both of them a

bit worse for wear, and of course, unshaven. I smiled at the picture that she painted of the three of them sitting together, scruffy and unkempt in that so-unique Young posture—and her groaning and thinking, “Now I’ll never get him to shave!” I often wish she’d taken a photo.

During my eighteen months in Toronto, I spent as much time as I could with Dad.

I sat on the back stoop with him, playing my songs on the guitar. He just sat and listened, tapping his fingers along with the music. I don’t think he’d listened to a lot of my music before. I was in a heavy rock band in Los Angeles called Sacred Child in the Eighties, and I know he and Margaret had our one record, but it wasn’t exactly easy listening. I think he kept it just because it was mine. I wanted him to know me that way. Dad had always been there for me when I was coming up through the ranks of cover bands in Toronto, back in the day. He’d come to see me here and there, sometimes with Margaret (once, notably, when there was a wet T-shirt contest in between sets), and sometimes by himself. He came with Bob to the El Mocambo to see me once, but even then, I hadn’t hit my stride. I was singing all right, but it takes years of being really bad to get really good. He sat through it all.

It was in moments like that, on the back stoop with my guitar, that we really connected. He was smoking his pipe; I was playing for him. That was a really good day.

After Dad stopped writing, and when eventually there was an unspoken acceptance of his new reality, he started to relax. But there was still talk of it, about the story he was thinking about getting to work on, that he just couldn’t seem to get down to. He gestured toward the bookcase one day, brow furrowed, and said:

“I think there are some books there that I wrote.”

It was almost like he was somebody else, looking in the window at Scott Young’s life and times. He could *almost* rec-

oncile that it was all about him, but he wasn't a hundred percent sure.

Neil's epiphany came when he invited Dad and Margaret to visit his house in Hawaii. It's such a beautiful spot, at the tip of a point break on the windward side of the island, and the temperate water surrounding it is full of colorful fish and sea turtles. It's like entering another world, snorkeling there off the shore. The show is so spectacular you could almost forget to swim. The fish comes in fresh every day. If you are like me, and never thought you could say the words: "Oh no! Not sashimi again!" in Hawaii there might be the impossible occasion that you'd at least think it. They have fresh papayas and mangoes, right from the tree, a greenhouse full of organic greens and herbs, and a perfect sunset every night, which everyone watches carefully for the "green flash" as the sun disappears into the ocean. (The green flash brings good luck, or a wish comes true or something like that, according to Pegi).

Life moves at a different pace, on the island, with no sense of urgency about anything. This would be a beautiful sanctuary: peaceful, gentle and warm, and truly awe-inspiring in its beauty and natural wonders. The locals say "no rain, no rainbows," but once you get past the humidity, and the fact that the sun disappears about five-thirty every night, you see that it truly is Eden. There's a reason they call this place Paradise.

At the time of their trip to Hawaii, Dad was, I think, kind of in a holding pattern. He still liked to do certain things and held on to his routines with firm regularity. One of these was his daily swim. At home, on the farm, this took place in our pool. One of the sounds of my youth was the big splash of Dad's first dive of the day.

One day in Hawaii, Neil saw Dad going out early, and when he asked where he was going, Dad said he was off for a swim.

"I don't think he realized where he was," Neil said. "I got

kind of worried there. You need to climb down some rocks to get in the water.”

So Neil went along, and saw for the first time that Dad’s mind was not connecting to his surroundings. Easy enough to keep an eye on him, but it was those moments where he would seem perfectly all right, perfectly normal, that you would see the conundrum. Sometimes I drive through an intersection in Toronto that looks very much like one in Los Angeles, and I go blank for a minute, not quite sure where I am. That must be what it’s like on a smaller, and less pervasive scale.

Bob’s epiphany, where Dad was concerned, never really came, I don’t think. His visits were sporadic and peppered with suspicion, as he and Margaret never got along. The times he did spend with Dad were pleasant, although brief. Margaret once said it was a blessing in a way that Dad couldn’t remember anymore that Bob stressed him out, and so they were able to spend some nice times together, talking and just sitting with each other. Bob and I would go on Father’s Day, me acting as a buffer of sorts. Dad would let Bob do most of the talking. When Dad got confused, he’d just say he was tired and go off to bed and that would be the end of it.

My persistence in selling the regular visits paid off though. My brothers would come from wherever they were in the world, and sometimes we’d actually all be there at the same time, a room full of Youngs, just *being Young*.

Those were rare and lingering moments. Not that we *never* saw each other, but it often just wasn’t physically possible. There were momentous occasions though, when we did gather as a clan, such as the opening of the Scott Young Public School in Omeme, and when Dad was awarded an honorary degree from Trent University in Peterborough. It was so important to Neil to be there, almost as important as it was to Dad to have us there.

In 1994, Neil was awarded the Governor General’s Per-



**Astrid with her grandmother, Jean: “Late night piano player and reveler”**

forming Arts Award at the Junos, and we were all there too—in fact, that was the first and only time I ever met Neil’s mom, Rassy. I wish I’d gotten to know her better. It was very important to Neil to have her there, to have us all there; that was the thing.

Growing up, I think having my parents take up sides against each other, one brother in California, one in Florida, a sister too far away to visit, gave me the wrong impression. It gave me the impression that it wasn’t necessary to be there for every little thing. Sure, folks’d miss you, but you had to put one foot in front of the other and just...go! It was a responsibility, almost, to leave behind the family unit and go seeking, to find that thing you’re looking for. But underneath it all I had a true and real need to be part of a family, the kind consisting of relatives and loved ones who didn’t seem like they were trying hard as hell to get away. My family nucleus

having already been splintered, I left too, and never looked back, until that one phone call to my dad changed everything.

Back in LA, I had idealized the homecoming in my mind. It would be great; I'd have so many things to talk about, so much to catch up on. I was proud coming home to my family because I'd reached my goals, and I felt I'd become a better person. I'd found those things I had been seeking, and now I was coming home. I wanted to show them that I was a different girl and nothing mattered more to me than my family, my father. My hero.

It wasn't that easy. I'd been gone for a long time, and when I'd left, it had been sudden. I hadn't exactly picked up all the pieces I'd left behind. I was twenty, still a kid really, and one with a driving purpose: to get my shot in the music business in Los Angeles. That was my holy grail. Now I was coming back, not in a blaze of glory, but gently, and with a good reason to be coming home. I felt I had every reason to be proud of myself, and to feel that I'd made my father proud of me.

What it's like to be part of this family, splintered as we are in so many ways, can be summed up easily if you ever have occasion to catch sight of us standing together. Walking under the same sky didn't make us family, but that's mostly all we had to connect us for most of my pre-teen life. So it's funny, then, that we have so many of the same quirks: the slouch, for instance (though I have done some work on *my* posture), the stance, the gripping scowl of death.

Those physical aspects are only on the surface. It is truly eerie when we speak the same words, though we are thousands of miles apart. Our unique ability to shift focus from one all-encompassing idea to another, imbuing all with a complex and sardonic humor, makes it apparent that we are all our father's children.

The age gap, the social phenomena we grew up with, the parts of the world we chose to migrate to, our fields of focus,

even the partners we chose, or didn't choose, all of these point to our differences rather than similarities. But even if there were years between times we were together (it's not often that long these days), there is a genuine excitement and recognition of that which is our undeniable legacy. I look at my brothers, and I see our father. I know they see him in me as well: at least, once they get past my resemblance to my mother.

There are a lot of reasons why I decided I needed to write this book and none of them was because there needs to be another Neil Young biography. This book will be more than me writing about my life as a rock star's sister, more than just the fantastic road stories I have to tell, more than covering material that's left out of music magazines.

My father was my hero: he still is. And I know that Neil's identity and the things that he holds sacred are firmly anchored in those parts of us that sprang from being our father's children. I've searched my creative soul for a way I could make him smile up there in the fifth world, and so I'm going to try and pick up where he left off in *Neil and Me*. It's a great book. I read it last year and had daydream memories of the times we'd had while he was writing it.

We drove to Dallas, Dad and I, to connect with the *Trans* tour at the Fair Park auditorium. In some ways, it was just like the trips of my childhood, cruising south, state by state, eating fried chicken in Kentucky, stopping at a Waffle House in Tennessee, staying at kitschy roadside motels along the way, scraping my knees on the worn Berber carpet when I fell out of bed, Dad holding court in his lawn chair outside, drinking rum and ginger ale and smoking his pipe. This time though, it was just him and me.

On this trip, Dad divulged the odd grown-up detail about his life with Margaret, and things about his relationship with my mother that maybe I didn't really want to know.

"We had a very lusty relationship, your mother and I," he

averred. I didn't know quite what to say. One's parents' sex life is never on ground that you need to tread. "After the dental surgery," (the beginning of the end, if one reads the facts correctly), "she was in so much pain, she cried all the time. And she didn't want to kiss, or cuddle. Or make love." He left it off there. Anyone could fill in the blanks. Was he trying to rationalize to me their breakup? I knew how dreadful it had been. I was there. But I let him talk. How many times do people get the chance to give their side of the story?

At the time, my mother had told me, straight up, "Your father has a girlfriend." That was that, the cardinal sin, in a nutshell. Nothing more needed to be said. But that was years ago, and I was considerably closer to being an adult by this time, and maybe Dad thought it was time for me to get it straight from the horse's mouth.

That's when I heard confirmed for the first time that the surgery that sent Mom into her downward spiral had been elective, born of vanity and lack of impetus to change her lifestyle. The drinking and the pain medication didn't combine well. Her judgment was clouded, if not downright impaired. That had been a difficult time for all of us. Dad had been working three jobs: his regular column in the paper (*Globe and Mail*, I think); sitting on a Royal Commission to study violence in the media; and also anchoring a nightly live news program (*The City Show*) on the newly formed City TV, channel 79. He was a busy guy, but it was par for the course; his life was much the same as it had always been. The big difference now was that Mom could not attend the parties; Mom couldn't host parties; Mom didn't feel up to going to the hockey games dressed in the full regalia of her position as wife of the handsome newspaperman she'd married.

So, I suppose, it was just a matter of time. I was always sure it had started innocently enough, but in getting to know my father through his memoirs and through stories told by my

cousins, I had to eventually admit that it was just who he was. You'd only have to see him, even at eighty years old, in a crowd of folks, and notice the women and how they responded to him: all a-flutter and in full flirt. And he ate it up, like any good man with the prospect of coming home to a house of pain and misery, regardless of how good it *had* been...

I comfort myself with knowing that their love was true, for a time. I don't blame my father, and I cannot blame my mother. They did the best they could, and they played it out, each as the person they absolutely were. After my mother passed away, I came across many letters that my father had written to her, during and after their marriage. One such letter convinced me of how deep their love was, and how, removing the unfortunate events that would ensue, it could have lasted the rest of their lives.

In an interview that I read with Neil, he voiced some thoughts on some decisions he had made. It was almost as if Dad had spoken the words himself, and I know that in so many words, he might have explained it to me in the same way:

"I wish there could've been a little less damage, but I can't see that I would've done anything differently."

On our road trip, arriving in Dallas, Dad and I found a little motel on a neon strip just off the freeway and settled in there. Neil and his crew would be arriving the following day to set up for the shows. Not knowing the city, I stuck close by, and we had a quiet time in our separate rooms, me flipping unfamiliar channels, Dad probably watching a game of some sort, smoking a pipe. He was at home anywhere in the world.

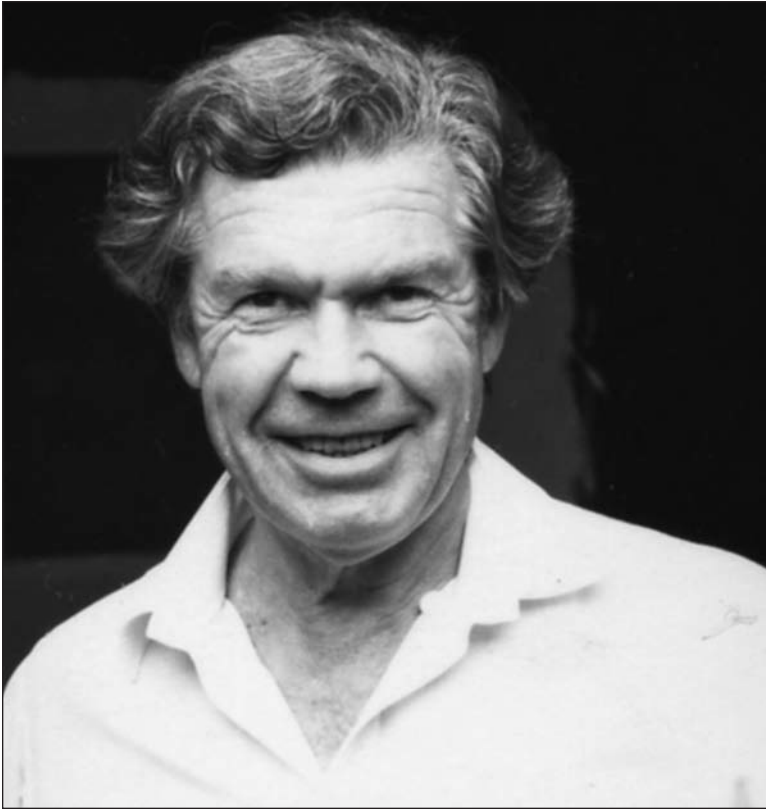
I reckon the world was not quite ready for the *Trans* show. Neil had just come back from Europe where he'd toured with the "Transband," which was Ben Keith, Nils Lofgren, Bruce Palmer, Ralph Molina, and Joe Lala. He had been

writing songs for what became *Trans* with the newest piece of recording gear, the Synclavier. It was a monster, especially when you think of it by today's standards—a whole four megs of RAM in a \$250,000 package. Geez, I look at my iMac and damned if it couldn't do a much better job, all for less than two grand. But I digress ...

The Synclavier was a force to be reckoned with, a deluxe sampler with real instrument sounds. The first of its kind, though many were to follow—the Fairlight most notably, at about a tenth of the price—but I think Neil's policies in these matters can be summed up by what he told me once when he sent me to buy barbecue sauce at the grocery store: “Just get the most expensive one,” Neil advised. “The one with the best packaging.” You get what you pay for. So if the Synclavier was the best sauce for the cheese at hand, best slather it on!

The Synclavier was made by New England Digital, and one of the bonuses of being a Synclav owner was that you got the programmer with the package. Wells Christie was his name, and his programming skills, as well as his passion for the work at hand were an inspiration to watch. He seemed to be able to do anything with that beast, from scoring for film and television, to rock and roll, to realizing Neil's reality-stretching audiologic vision. I admired him greatly. He was, I think, the prototype of what the Pro Tools programmer is to the recording industry today: untiring, a talent that went above and beyond, ultimately indispensable.

The *Trans* tour started off as a solo thing, just Neil and the computer. It was self-indulgent, and I think that European audiences might have responded with more interest and less denial than the Americans displayed. One fan's impassioned cries of “What are you *doing*, Neil?” kind of summed up the



**Scott Young: “My father was my hero. Still is.”**

general feeling of most of the crowds. They clapped politely and talked among themselves between screams for “*Southern Man!*” and “*Cinnamon Girl!*” Neil responded by flashing a hand-held mirror at the spotlights after pretending to be punching an array of codes “into” it.

“*What are you doing, Neil?*” Indeed.

It was a fantastic show though: there was video, in the form of a running newscast by character actor Newell Alexander, who played a smarmy anchorman named Dan Clear. Dan would air before the show, and in the break, to indicate the venue’s exits and nearest bomb shelter in case of attack. It was a tongue-in-cheek paranoia that was fun to play

with, and I instantly fell into hanging with the video crew, helping out when they'd give me something to do, up to and including ideas for Dan Clear segments.

Next thing I knew, Dad was planning to drive back home, and I was offered a job if I wanted to stick around. What was there to decide? I was in!

This was the first chance I'd had to get to know Neil close up, and even so, I spent more time with the crew, who took me under their wing. Some of those friendships have lasted a lifetime, and have at times served as my model for viewing the world. I had always been an awkward kid, but here, for the first time, I was part of the team. And I wasn't an only child anymore: there was my brother, there! Looking back, though, I wish I had spent more time with Neil and Pegi, who had a very small Ben with them on the bus, and were constantly occupied with his care and comfort. But I was afraid, believe it or not. He was my brother, but he had taken on such iconic proportions in my life, and I had been so used to dodging reality as it pertained to being a Young that I suppose I couldn't see the difference, even though I was *there*. Even though it was *real*.

I am a different person now. He doesn't intimidate me (much at all) anymore.

And still, in some ways I don't know him at all. He is my brother, and we have an indelible connection. And yet, if I died thinking that I never got the chance to really get to know him, aside from the music, aside from all the things we *actually* shared, I would be lacking as a sister.



**Family at the Farm. left to right top row: Scott, Adam Newman, Neil, Caitlin Hogan (stepsister) Niall Finnegan, Erin Hogan Finnegan (stepsister). Bottom row: Margaret Hogan (stepmother), Pegi (Amber on her lap) Ben Young, me, Zeke Young; seated in front Maggie Hogan Newman (stepsister) about 1990**