

The Sandpiper

by Robert Peterson

She was six years old when I first met her on the beach near where I live.

I drive to this beach, a distance of three or four miles, whenever the world begins to close in on me. She was building a sand castle or something and looked up, her eyes as blue as the sea.

"Hello," she said.

I answered with a nod, not really in the mood to bother with a small child.

"I'm building," she said.

"I see that. What is it?" I asked, not really caring.

"Oh, I don't know, I just like the feel of sand."

That sounds good, I thought, and slipped off my shoes. A sandpiper glided by.

"That's a joy," the child said.

"It's a what?"

"It's a joy. My mama says sandpipers come to bring us joy."

The bird went gliding down the beach. Good-bye joy, I muttered to myself, hello pain, and turned to walk on. I was depressed, my life seemed completely out of balance.

"What's your name?" She wouldn't give up.

"Robert," I answered. "I'm Robert Peterson."

"Mine's Wendy... I'm six."

"Hi, Wendy."

She giggled. "You're funny," she said.

In spite of my gloom, I laughed too and walked on. Her musical giggle followed me.

"Come again, Mr. P," she called. "We'll have another happy day."

The next few days consisted of a group of unruly Boy Scouts, PTA meetings, and an ailing mother. The sun was shining one morning as I took my hands out of the dishwasher. I need a sandpiper, I said to myself, gathering up my coat. The ever-changing balm of the seashore awaited me.. The breeze was chilly but I strode along, trying to recapture the serenity I needed.

"Hello, Mr. P," she said. "Do you want to play?"

"What did you have in mind?" I asked, with a twinge of annoyance.

"I don't know. You say."

"How about charades?" I asked sarcastically.

The tinkling laughter burst forth again. "I don't know what that is."

"Then let's just walk."

Looking at her, I noticed the delicate fairness of her face.

"Where do you live?" I asked.

"Over there." She pointed toward a row of summer cottages.

Strange, I thought, in winter.

"Where do you go to school?"

"I don't go to school. Mummy says we're on vacation"

She chattered little girl talk

as we

strolled up the

beach, but my mind

was on other things.

When I left for

home, Wendy said it

had been a happy day. Feeling surprisingly better, I smiled at her and agreed.

Three weeks later, I rushed to my beach in a state of near panic. I was in no mood to even greet Wendy. I thought I saw her mother on the porch and felt like demanding she keep her child at home.

"Look, if you don't mind," I said crossly when Wendy caught up with me, "I'd rather be alone today." She seemed unusually pale and out of breath.

"Why?" she asked.

I turned to her and shouted, "Because my mother died!" and thought, My God, why was I saying this to a little child?

"Oh," she said quietly, "then this is a bad day."

"Yes," I said, "and yesterday and the day before and - oh, go away!"

"Did it hurt?" she inquired.

"Did what hurt?" I was exasperated with her, with myself.

"When she died?"

"Of course it hurt!" I snapped, misunderstanding, wrapped up in myself. I strode off.

A month or so after that, when I next went to the beach, she wasn't there. Feeling guilty, ashamed, and admitting to myself I missed her, I went up to the cottage after my walk and knocked at the door. A drawn looking young woman with honey-colored hair opened the door.

"Hello," I said, "I'm Robert Peterson. I missed your little girl today and wondered where she was."

"Oh yes, Mr. Peterson, please come in. Wendy spoke of you so much. I'm afraid I allowed her to bother you. If she was a nuisance, please, accept my apologies."

"Not at all! she's a delightful child." I said, suddenly realizing that I meant what I had just said.

"Wendy died last week, Mr. Peterson. She had



leukemia. Maybe she didn't tell you."

Struck dumb, I groped for a chair. I had to catch my breath.

"She loved this beach, so when she asked to come, we couldn't say no. She seemed so much better here and had a lot of what she called happy days. But the last few weeks, she declined rapidly..." Her voice faltered, "She left something for you, if only I can find it. Could you wait a moment while I look?"

I nodded stupidly, my mind racing for something to say to this lovely young woman. She handed me a smeared envelope with "MR. P" printed in bold childish letters.. Inside was a drawing in bright crayon hues -- a yellow beach, a blue sea, and a brown bird. Underneath was carefully printed:

A SANDPIPER TO BRING YOU JOY.

Tears welled up in my eyes, and a heart that had almost forgotten to love opened wide. I took Wendy's mother in my arms. "I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry," I uttered over and over, and we wept together. The precious little picture is framed now and hangs in my study. Six words -- one for each year of her life -- that speak to me of harmony, courage, and undemanding love.

A gift from a child with sea blue eyes and hair the color of sand -- who taught me the gift of love.

NOTE: This is a true story sent out by Robert Peterson. It happened over 20 years ago and the incident changed his life forever. It serves as a reminder to all of us that we need to take time to enjoy living and life and each other. The price of hating other human beings is loving oneself less.

This week, be sure to give your loved ones an extra hug, and by all means, take a moment... even if it is only ten seconds, to stop and smell the roses.

Feedback From Taylor

Hi there everyone,

I had the most amazing time at the **Tamworth Country Music Festival** in January. The weather was nice and cool, which was a complete change from the normal hot weather we always get for the festival.

I was kept very busy as I was a guest at 17 shows in Tamworth. I performed at the **Davidson Brothers Bluegrass Breakfast**, **Jim Haynes Brekky Shows**, **Carter & Carter SHINE**

showcase, **Andrew Clermont's Bluegrass nights**, **the Australian Bush Laureate Awards** and more. I had many early starts and late nights. I thoroughly enjoyed myself and met so many people.

The past two years, I haven't been able to do much busking. Last year I had problems with my banjo and this year my PA wasn't working! I was so disappointed but in the time I busked, I had 3 radio interviews and **Beccy Cole** saw me.

I went to see a few concerts in Tamworth including **Beccy Cole**, **The Golden Guitars** and **Kasey Chambers**. I was thrilled to be a part of the **Toyota Country Music Cavalcade**. The Tamworth City Council rang me and invited me to be in the Cavalcade. The Council organised a car just like the **Get Smart** car in the TV Show. It was a red sports car - Volkswagen Karmann Ghia. I yodelled and played the banjo all the way down Peel Street. There were 110 floats. It was so much fun!

I didn't enter any competitions in Tamworth as I was busy with other things. But I was happy to be a Finalist in the **Tamworth Songwriters Awards** with my song "**I Love My Style**". A song I wrote about my love for playing the banjo. This song is now on my new CD. I recorded the CD at **Red Brick Studio** and the CD features 2 of my originals, plus Yodelling songs and songs I played on my banjo. I am thrilled with how many I have already sold.

Thank you for your support and.....
Keep it Country & Buegrass!

Taylor Pfeiffer (The Banjo Girl)



Taylor with the Davidson Brothers