

## INTERVIEW WITH YVONNE BREAUX (FISHER) -- JUNE 1995

*Yvonne Breaux (Fisher) was born in Houston, Texas in November of 1960. During their formative years, she and Dave and their respective families attended St. Thomas More Church. Yvonne and Dave later became fellow pianists in high school band together and also dated briefly. Married and a mother of three, today Yvonne works full time for the Kroger Company, supervising some twenty stores, and is the church pianist/organist at St. Mary's in Houston.*

My dad is still one of the church organists at St. Thomas More, the church David also attended while growing up. It's a big church and they have a lot of organists. There are eight kids in our family, a big typical Catholic family.

Mom was the one who started me with piano lessons when I was six or seven, and I took lessons all the way up through tenth grade. I used to go to competitions and played chamber music. I was a classical pianist mostly. In high school I was in several bands and didn't have the time to keep up with private lessons so I dropped them. I'm a good sight-reader.

Although David and I attended the same church growing up I don't have specific memories of him from there. At church we weren't individuals. We were *families*. It was the Catney's, the Breaux's, the Clarks... You were not known specifically as an individual. You were part of a family. And it was funny because the Catney's all looked alike. And we were all reddish blond hair and freckles. Everybody had a unique characteristic to their family, and I just remember the Catney's and always thinking of them as a group. And I'm sure they always thought of us, "there's the Breaux's ... " We weren't individuals. So in the early days I knew the Catney's, but just as a group, just how they probably knew us.

Thinking back, David was not in anything but band classes with me in high school. In junior high, my brother was in band with him at Johnston. I thought David was a nerd. He was tall and gangly and he was in the band. Now I was the serious student and all. I didn't know him real well but I'd see him around campus. He was skinny, tall and just a nerd. My younger brother played trombone in the band, and somehow David knew that I played the piano, and he sent my brother home to ask me to teach him to play the piano. Chris said, "Hey Yvonne, Dave Catney wants a big favor." I was just like, "Whattttt?" "He wants you to teach him how to play the piano." I was like, "NO WAY! There is no way he is coming over to our house. He's a nerd!" I think my brother liked him a lot and thought, "Oh no, I've got to go back and tell this guy there's no way my sister will do that for you..."

I have no clue when David got interested in the piano. I didn't even know he played it. From that conversation I would have thought he didn't know anything. I had no clue he was planning on playing the piano at that time. I just knew I wasn't going to teach him how, and he wasn't coming to our house! There was no way.

I laugh now because when we got into tenth grade and we were in the second stage band together, he was fantastic. I think I was a little miffed initially, like "*What is the deal here...* How did he learn all this?!" And he was so confident and so poised. He was great. He was very friendly, never vain or conceited, and I'm sure once he scoped out my playing ability he knew I was no competition, so it was like, "Oh, we can be nice to her!" We played in the percussion section in back. It was a great section to be in, and I was usually the only female back there, so it was great.

I was thinking today about how David always walked. It seemed like he was leaning forward. He was real skinny and he was tall and he would lean forward when he walked. He was very enthusiastic. David was a salesperson. It was amazing

the way he got the sousaphone core going in the band. He did that; he was a salesperson. It was incredible how he taught these guys to play, because my brother was one of them. He was just like, "We're going to do this!", and he had everyone excited about it. That was David, constantly selling, constantly "We're going to do this!" He was very sharing with me. Every year the band always recorded an album, and I played piano on one of the tunes. He said, "Hey, this would sound so cool if you'd play this riff at the end," and he taught it to me. I had no imagination. I could only read music and could barely improvise at that time, but I did that riff on the tune. David was very generous about that. He would help me. "Come here, look at this ..." I would read the music, where David would play and feel the music. The only thing I could do better than him was play every note that was on the page. David was always just bouncing all over the music room. He was a lot of fun.

I'm sure Nancy told you about him driving her car, how he loved to drive Nancy's car. David liked to take the car and put it in the opposite lane you were supposed to be driving in, and accelerate. David's philosophy was driving 90 miles an hour in the wrong lane *with enthusiasm*. I think he always wanted to make sure that, "Everyone's having fun, and I'm having fun." I was in my friend's car one time, and we were going up the road and she goes, "Oh my God!" There was a car, a Plymouth Duster, coming right at us, and I could see David turning the wheel into the lane right at us. I said, "Why, there's David!" I think he liked danger. "I am wild, I am crazy, and I can make this car do whatever I want!" Nancy would just let him go to town in that car. I think she had a real big crush on him.

I remember for a while he got into this habit of licking everyone's nose. He would go up to you in the hall and come right up and lick you from the bottom up to the top of your nose, and you were like, "Stop, David, stop!" He went through a phase of doing that, and it would make you laugh. It would get your attention.

David and some of the people in the band used to hang out on Friday and Saturday nights, and they'd come over and climb the ladder up to the window, singing and serenade people's parents. Some nights I'd be spending the night with a girlfriend or be out, and the next day mom would go, "Yvonne, last night those crazy band people came by ..." But we used to go around and sing to people's houses. My mom would say, "There were people here singing on a ladder last night!" We used to sing to David's mother and we sang to Tom's mother. This wasn't Christmastime either. It was just something we did.

I was dating Tom Dybala in high school for a real long time, and I guess David had liked me. Tom and I broke up in eleventh grade, and David had asked me out. This must have been during finals because we had a two hour lunch break, and he asked me to lunch. We walked up to the China House where he worked and had lunch. The owners loved him. "Oh David, David ..." They were patting him on the back and beaming with pride. Here's David, the great David, the busboy... And I'm sure he entertained them with that great personality of his. I was really hungry, and he made me eat with chopsticks. It was like, "Are you kidding? You know, we're here to eat *food*, David!" But he was like, "Oh, no ..." He was an expert with chopsticks. He was fantastic with chopsticks and he made me eat with chopsticks although I think he finally gave up on me. "OK, you can use your fork!" Then we walked back and went to Westbury Square. We must have stopped at some store because he bought me a little ceramic figure. I don't know what it was now, but he bought it for me.

I guess he had written me a song. I can't tell you what the name of it was. He wrote some kind of love song and played it on the piano and sang it for me. It was really pretty. The only words I can remember are, "If you don't love me, the stars will go out in the sky and turn black ..." It was a great song, and he sang it really well. And I guess I got back with Tom right

around that time and I said, "This was great Dave. Great fun and all, but I'm so crazy about Tom," and he tore the song up. We were in band, and he looked over at Nancy across the room and he just tore it up. It was written on paper and he played it on the piano and all, and she just kind of nodded her head. I yelled at her a little bit. I was mad and said, "*Hey!* He can worship me and do all these things, and how dare you encourage him to do this!" That was my thinking, and she was like, "Oh I didn't know he was doing that." And in my mind I thought, "Like hell you didn't!"

Months later I broke up with Tom again and I told David, "OK David, we broke up,"--that was to be his cue, "OK I'm available, "--and he just looked at me like, "Yeah, so what? You had your chance and you didn't go out with me." That didn't work out the way it was supposed to. He was supposed to come running and make Tom jealous for me!

In high school David was still pretty skinny but he looked better. But when he played my sister's wedding in the late '80s he looked great. He just got better looking and more handsome. When he took me out in high school I thought, "You know, he really is a great guy." When I later learned that David was gay and that he had AIDS it didn't make a difference about how I felt about him. It was like, "He's *David.*"

In high school we went to New Orleans with the band. Chuck Nolan would take us to New Orleans. And David wanted to go to the Blue Angel because some very famous trumpet player plays there. So we were going to go to the Blue Angel and see this guy. We had to walk pretty far to get to Bourbon Street, and oh man the line was long, but David waited to get in. He waited with Tom or somebody else to get in. The rest of us went ahead. "We're going to Pat O'Brien's and Hurricanes!" But I was thinking about that with New Orleans, how he had to get in to see that guy. That was like the whole point of his trip. We were going to see some jazz musicians, some real ones. We had a lot of fun on the band trips. We would bring lots of booze we weren't supposed to have. We'd go to Padre Island and just have a blast partying and running between the rooms, just like kids. Well, maybe not normal kids, I don't know. But we'd have fun. David liked to have fun.

I really didn't have contact with David after high school. I went on and had kids and got married. I'd read about him in the newspaper and was so excited to hear about him. I knew he made records but I didn't really realize how big he was. David's younger sister went to school with my younger sister Roberta and she would mention, "Well, David's doing cruise ships," so I knew he was playing cruise ships. And I'd always thought, "He's going to be famous someday. He's really going to go far in life." His drive was remarkable. He was always trying to get things together and he could talk people into doing things. He was very confident with himself. When we got to high school I was scared to death. I had no poise, and he had self-control, poise, showmanship. You put him on a stage and he was ready to perform. But he was driven. I think he was a perfectionist.

My sister had called me and said, "Yvonne, there's an article about David in the newspaper." I said, "Oh great!" She said, "Yvonne, I think he's dying." I said, "What to you mean?" She said, "I think he's dying of AIDS. He's having an album release party. I think maybe we should go." So we got our sisters and sister-in-laws together and we went. But I guess I knew, "I need to go see David." I was scared that when we got there he wouldn't remember me. It was really a very nice, quiet club, and we went up. They had the CD's for sale when you first got there. My sister bought two and then I got one. I think we were kind of early because we're nerds, and we got a seat near the front which was neat because it got really crowded. Other people were entertaining as David came in. My sister said, "OK, c'mon let's go get him to sign our CD's", and I was like, "I couldn't." I just couldn't walk over there. I was afraid to see him. I was afraid he'd just go, "OK, and who

are you?", or not recognize me or just be superficial. I didn't know what to expect and I sat there thinking, "Wow, maybe he's a little more well-known than I thought..." And that kind of made me feel bad.

But my sisters went up there and they said, "Hey, do you know who we are?" They're not shy. They said, "Yvonne's here!", and he goes, "Where? I have to see her!" So he came over to me and gave me a huge hug. "Yvonne, it is so good to see you!" He signed my CD, and it looked like he was thinking about what to write but he signed the same thing on everybody's. It says, "All my love, Dave Catney" on it. So I said, "Well, are you going to play tonight?" He said, "Yeah, we'll be playing later and dat da dat dah ..." I wear glasses but I didn't have them on, and my sister had said, "Can't you see all the makeup he has on his face?" I said, "He looks great!" She's like, "Oh Yvonne ...." But he looked great and he was happy. He looked skinny though. I did tell him, "David, you're so skinny!" He said, "Oh, we prefer to think of it as reverse weight management..."

He was just polished, smooth, the talker, but he was genuine. David played and it was just wonderful. He played wonderfully. You could tell he was a little tired, but he was David: playing the piano, working the crowd, telling jokes ... He was definitely putting out 120%. He was not cutting back any. The only thing I really noticed was that he was breathing a little hard. But he played beautifully.

It was really crowded with lots of people. I saw some of his family come in though they didn't come over and talk to us or anything. It was kind of dark and they might not have seen us. Sandra Dudley, the alto, sang that song of Dave's that night too. That was really neat. He made some crack about Bette Midler wanting to sing it, and Sandra was like, "'No, it's my song!" He also said something about when he wrote the song, the only person he could think about singing it was Sandra.

I was so happy to see him. I was just ecstatic. He was really nice to my sisters and sisters-in-laws. "God, this is so great!" I guess there were five of us there. I had wanted my brother to come, but it was tax season and he's a CPA, so he couldn't. I remember afterwards when we left, he must have gone out the back way because he was probably really tired. We were going down the street, and he was walking up the street and he goes, "Yvonne!" And he grabbed my sister and I and said, "It is so good to see you. You don't know how much it means to me." As he was talking to us, someone took a picture of all three of us. I don't know who it was. But Dave was just happy and cheerful and moving at a high pace. He was very upbeat, very optimistic. It was his party and he was going to have a good time and sell albums. I'd never been to Cezanne before. I think his comment was, "The idea behind it was that if you want good jazz you don't have to go to New York. You can come right here to Houston." So that was neat.

Maybe a week or two later we had gotten our Westbury School Alumnus albums that contained everyone's phone number who had ever graduated, and he called me and left a message on my answering machine. "Yvonne, this is David." He told me that he'd called up all these different people--there's no telling who he all called; he probably went through the book, "Hey, who's this guy?--and he said, "I want you to call me and here's my number and da dat dah da ..." I called a couple of nights later and left a message on the answering machine. He never called me back, and I didn't call him. Then my mom called me and told me they had announced in church that he had died, and I felt really bad. "I never called him back..." He had his funeral on a Holy Day of Obligation, so I had to play Mass, but I went to the get together at the Museum Restaurant afterwards.

I have a Billy Joel music book that David had written in. I guess he diagrammed some of the songs with chords. I still have the book because I use it for weddings sometimes.