

## **PREFACE**

### **MY VOICE**

The first time I heard it, I was mortified, left nearly speechless for days, saying no more than required to function or be polite. Even after I “recovered” ...my voice, I’ve been varying degrees of self-conscious about it ever since hearing a recording of it for the first time. “Is that... what I sound like?”

Whatever I heard in my head didn’t sound like what I heard on tape. I only became aware of the discrepancy after Ma and Del bought me a tape recorder, something I just had to have as a Christmas gift. Eventually, I wore out that contraption, recording anything and everything... other than my voice.

I held out hope after big people told me my voice would change with the coming “change.” That change came during fifth grade, when, for a few days, I sounded like I had a severe case of laryngitis, hormones strangling me. I figured if my throat was that bad, hormones must be doing some major renovation, so my voice would be that good once I got it back. Ummm, no. I only needed to say a few lines before I knew my voice hadn’t changed as hoped or even at all. I was stuck with what I had, there no second coming of puberty, no second chance for a better voice.

Knowing how my voice sounded to others and hearing it in my head every time I spoke, it was hard to ignore. Sort of the same problem dieters have when compared to people with an addiction trying to quit their habit, because while one can live without booze, drugs, or cigarettes, food... not so much. I couldn't avoid my voice. It followed me everywhere like an out-of-tune shadow. Worse, Del and Jay were everywhere, with their more than radio-worthy voices reminding me, unintentionally, that mine was not.

The only voice-related thing I had going for me was volume, as I could scream louder than most anyone. There was little call for it unless I entered an Arkansas hog-calling competition. That my voice was all quantity and no quality frustrated me because I liked the radio thing. Sitting in the studio with Del or Jay, what they did seemed like something I'd enjoy doing, but I didn't have the voice for it.

At least I realized early on that I lacked the proper skill set because I hear too many working in the media who are not as self-aware or don't have a friend with the stones to tell them to find another career. I didn't have that problem because, like my voice, my harshest critic was always right there with me - me. However, I was hardly my only critic, the child version of me seemingly not doing much to the satisfaction of others, even the things I couldn't do anything about.

I talked funny, I walked funny, and some told me I looked funny. That worked for me, though, when it came to imitating cartoon voices, as I already sounded like an animated character. Years later, those cartoon voices served a practical purpose, helping me, the teacher, get my point across when my words, spoken as me, couldn't, but could when said as Kermit the Frog, to a classroom of English as a second language speakers.

As for my walk, although it seemed a genetic thing, as others in my family walked on their toes with a bounce, I worked on my gait. More conscious of the speed and manner with which I put one foot in front of the other, I smoothed my stride. Even my looks improved, with time, enough for me to grow into my head because I only ever changed my hairstyle, which didn't make much difference.

But my voice? There was nothing I could do about that. It was what it always was: a "problem." Knowing I didn't have a voice for TV or radio, along came middle school, where I discovered I had a suitable voice for print. This learned after writing stories, mostly fiction, for Mrs. Winkler, my sixth grade English teacher, she apparently so desperate for something to grade that she handed out writing assignments seemingly every day.

Fifty years later, getting serious about writing only after I turned 50, I finally felt I'd gotten as good as I could and would get. Good enough, publishing books became a real possibility and then a reality. Tempted to become an author years before I did - the urge strong - I resisted, thanks to my speaking voice, not wanting to publish until I was sure my writing voice, the one I could do something about, wouldn't embarrass me.

Waiting wasn't easy, but I had the good fortune to encounter a book by an author who'd rushed to publish, which helped. That book was bad, and that wasn't just my opinion, as Sue struggled to finish after I put it down after only one chapter. Even so, I kept a copy to remind me not to publish until my writing voice was one readers would want to hear. After countless hours writing and editing my stories to make it so, I've listened to that voice for several years... it now your turn...