

Filling in for Aunt Winifred

Narrated by Sherlee O'Connor

Reported by Nicole Sharpe

Around the summer of 1949, my Aunt Winifred sang on the WCLS music station back in the town I, Sherlee O'Connor, grew up in. She was one of those music artists that took song requests from people who phoned into the radio station and sang them on air. I was only sixteen years old when the station asked me to fill in for my sick-with-the-flu-aunt for a couple of days while she recovered. I was terrified! For my Aunt Winifred had an incredible amount of talent for a singer, and considering my young age and the fact that I had very little vocal experience, I had no idea whatsoever as to how I was going to take her place. That morning I drove to the station with an intention of telling the broadcaster that there was no way I was going to be able to fill in for my aunt, but he simply ignored me and shoved me through the door into the broadcasting room while spitting directions at me.

I observed the room, feeling a little nervous, and panicked. The broadcasting studio was a small room that felt stuffy due to the flood of sunshine radiating through the window overlooking the Rocky Mountains. Directly opposite of this was another window that peered into the recording studio.

Before I knew it the first caller dialed in requesting that I sing the song, "Five Foot Two, Eyes of Blue." A jolt of adrenaline shot through my body as I began the song. I was doing fine until my mind blanked and I forgot the melody of the song. My heart beat quickened a bit as I wondered what I should do. I took a few deep breaths. I knew I had to go on so I decided on narrating the song. I was so scared of what the broadcaster would think, that I could barely think myself. To my surprise, once I finished, I received a round of compliments, so I decided to carry on the tradition. I began to narrate every song and people loved it. By the end of the third day, my aunt was feeling much better and it was time for me to leave. I received \$100 and a round of goodbyes and I left.

I had a wonderful three days and was sad to leave. On the up side, the experience convinced me to join choir and participate in school musicals. I even came to fall in love with poetry. I got so good that one of my poems was published as a song in our church musical program. To this day I visit with students at Sunset Middle School to share stories like this one. "I still love to write songs and poetry and I think I always will," I told one of the eighth graders, Nicole Sharpe.