

Harlan Yarbrough

## The Faire

Wendy Robson attended the Lifestyle Faire with her husband, Jonah, every year in order to sell her artwork. Having done well at previous Lifestyle Faires and similar events, she felt confident of making the Faire worthwhile financially, all the more so because Jonah's booking as one of the Lifestyle Faire's entertainers guaranteed more than the cost of her stall and their minimal expenses. The Faire's sprawling rural grounds held a special place in both Wendy's and Jonah's hearts—they had met there, fallen in love there, and spent many pleasant days and hours there, first separately and then together over more than a decade and a half.

Wendy produced a substantial quantity of beautiful art in a broad range of media. She created and sold paintings, sculptures, drawings, and a huge range of craft items from jewelry to beautiful wooden boxes to contain jewelry and other small items. Jonah's art resided in his music, although he sometimes made pretty candles that Wendy sold from her stalls and occasionally produced harnesses, belts, and other practical leather items or rustic wooden toys. When customers complimented the beauty of his pieces, Jonah said, "Thank you. Wendy's the artist, though. I'm barely a craftsman. I can make beautiful music, but, when I make physical objects, I make things to do a job, and that's about the extent of my skills—but thanks for your kind words. Wendy's the one who creates beautiful objects."

Wendy appreciated Jonah's music, both because she enjoyed hearing it and because it brought in the majority of their income. Their twelve-year relationship and their ten year marriage had not been devoid of disagreements and arguments and even major blow-ups. Wendy's "mild" bi-polar disorder, diagnosed by a psychiatrist she had seen—at the suggestion of a counsellor—in the tenth year the Robsons were together and the eighth year of their marriage, seemed to make occasional dramatic scenes almost inevitable, but they had so far weathered all those storms.

Perhaps because of the BPD, the loudest and most intense—and sometimes abusive—eruptions came from Wendy. Almost always, Jonah quickly responded with a hug and gentle, loving questions, as, for example, "Do we really have to fight?" or "Is this really what we want?" or "What can I do, how can I help?" That didn't always work, didn't always defuse the situation, but more often than not it allowed Wendy to recognize within a few minutes that what she was doing wasn't helpful or productive or even healthy.

The Lifestyle Faire consistently proved Wendy's biggest money-earner of the year, so she always prepared well in advance and built up her stock in the months before the event. This year, she felt uneasy and a little resentful, because Jonah had gone on a work trip three weeks before the Faire. Wendy recognized both the financial necessity of his tour and that Jonah's earnings from the three weeks would almost equal her earnings for the year. Nevertheless, she wanted him home, wanted his support there and at the Faire.

Jonah had told his wife he would be back in time for the Faire, but she still worried. She knew his last gig in Colorado took place in Denver on the Friday night of the weekend before the Lifestyle Faire and that he had a gig in Salt Lake the following night and a Sunday afternoon gig in Boise. If Jonah could drive straight through after the Boise gig, he could arrive home in the middle of the night and be home to help Wendy pack

for the Faire. The problem arose from a gig in Yakima on Tuesday, that meant he couldn't get home until early Wednesday morning.

Wendy and Jonah usually drove their loaded van to the Faire site on Wednesday and camped in it for the next five nights, unloading her wares and setting up Wendy's booth Wednesday and Thursday. If anything delayed Jonah's return, they would arrive late at the site and feel pressured throughout the setting up, so Wendy fretted and fumed.

In the event, Jonah arrived a little before six Wednesday morning and immediately began packing Wendy's tubs and bins and boxes into the van. He took a two-hour nap later in the morning, while Wendy filled her last few boxes with jewelry and related paraphernalia. As soon as he woke, he stowed those last few boxes in the van and drove his wife and her wares the ninety-odd minutes to the Faire site. Once there, the two got the booth in order and set the less valuable and less fragile items out under tarpaulins. Some of the food booths had opened early to serve the stall-holders, so Jonah bought dinner for himself and his wife.

Although looking forward to his annual "busman's holiday" of jamming with musician friends he met but once a year, Jonah seemed to sense something troubled his beloved wife and said he'd decided to forego the jamming to provide what emotional support he could for her. He made gentle, tactful attempts to get her to talk about whatever bothered her but without much success. After two hours, they retired to the comfortable bed in the back of their van.

Still madly in love with his wife after a dozen years together, Jonah, even though severely sleep-deficient, expressed both enough desire and enough energy for conjugal activity, but Wendy felt distracted and opted for sleep. Jonah's sleep deficit carried him quickly to sleep in the absence of interest on Wendy's part.

Thursday felt like any other year on the day before the Lifestyle Faire—getting Wendy’s stall ‘just so’, catching up with friends, last minute repairs and adjustments, and a couple of jam sessions. Although Jonah seemed to sense some residual disturbance of Wendy’s demeanor, she enjoyed the music and catching up with friends they saw only once a year. She didn’t ask herself why Jonah seemed worried, because she knew she was carrying—and perhaps unwittingly expressing—residual resentment over the possibility Jonah could have arrived home late, even though he didn’t.

*That’s silly*, Wendy’s rational mind said. *He got home in plenty of time, and we got here and unpacked as early as ever.* Her feelings, as feelings are wont to do, ignored her rational thoughts and resented Jonah’s itinerary having made her worry. In a perverse and contradictory twist, Wendy’s annoyance with herself for her unreasonable resentment about Jonah’s trip did not inspire kinder behavior toward her long-suffering husband.

When Jonah had done everything he possibly could toward getting the stall set up and ready for the Faire to begin, he said, “If you don’t have anything you want me to do, I’ll go jam with Wally and the Angeletti brothers. You could come, too—you haven’t had any time with Betty.”

“Sure!” Wendy replied, almost shouting. “You go on over and have your fun with Ricky and George and Wally. You don’t give a damn about me.”

Jonah began to make soothing noises, but his wife continued, “Betty doesn’t like me anyway.”

“Of course she does,” Jonah began, “and I love you. I’ll stay here, if you want. I don’t have to jam w—”

“Just go, dammit! Go!”

“But W—”

“Go! I don’t want to see you. Just go!”

After several minutes of that, Jonah said, “OK, OK, I’ll go. But I’d be happy to stay h—”

“No! Just go!”

As Jonah began walking slowly away, an instrument case in each hand, Wendy called after him, “And don’t come back!”

Once Jonah was out of sight, Wendy pounded her fists on the carefully-joined slabs that constituted her stall’s front counter. Her pounding made pieces of jewelry jump beneath the fabric draped over them, fortunately not propelling any to the ground, and made Wendy’s hands sore. She had not yet set her sleeping bag on the foam pad Jonah had placed on one side of the stall, so she sat on the grass under one of the rustic tables he had built. She somehow even managed to resent that Jonah had made the tables, although they were sturdy and served her well every year. Sobbing quietly, she rocked back and forth under the table.

Had the stallholders on either side been in their stalls, they would have heard Wendy’s sobs and come over to inquire what was wrong and offer support—the Faire was that kind of place, a community, almost a family—but both groups were off socializing elsewhere. As a result, Wendy rocked and sobbed and sobbed and rocked for more than an hour, before she pulled her sleeping bag out of the van and threw it on top of the canvas-covered pad.

She could hear Jonah’s singing, his voice carrying the two hundred yards from where the other musicians were camped, and his beautiful harmonies to their voices, and that made her sob more. The music, and Wendy’s sobbing, went on for another hour. Remembering what she had said, she worried. *Maybe he really won’t come back. What if some beautiful groupie takes him back to her tent or camper?* Such thoughts made Wendy

cry all the more, as she lay on top of her sleeping bag, pressing her face hard into it and the pad beneath to hide her sobs and stifle her occasional scream.

Wendy had succumbed to Jonah's charms at the Lifestyle Faire twelve years before the night of her sobbing screaming fit, and she knew several women who had entered into liaisons with Jonah at the Faire in the years before that. She could easily imagine some young beauty recognizing him as the man who could make her dreams come true and persuading him she could do the same for him. In this negative swing of Wendy's BPD, she did not perceive the Faire as a special place, a good place. Instead, she thought of it as a place that might take her husband away from her, a threatening place, a frightening place.

*What if he doesn't come back!?* Wendy thought with increasing panic. Jonah didn't need anything from their campsite at Wendy's stall—he had his instruments with him and clothes on his back. He didn't even need the van—he could just intensify his performing schedule and buy another one. He could just walk away, could stay away as Wendy had told him to do. Thinking of that precipitated another bout of muffled sobbing and screaming.

*What if he never comes back!?* Wendy almost convinced herself to walk over and visit Wally's wife, Betty, and listen to the beautiful music, sure that Jonah would then come home with her. Or almost sure. Not quite sure—and Wendy knew she could never endure the pain and the ignominy if he refused to return with her to their campsite. She therefore did not risk the possibility and instead sobbed and screamed into her bedding for another hour.

The music stopped, out of deference to other campers' desire for sleep, but the sobbing continued. When Mrs. Robson noticed that the singing and playing had ceased, she could not remember how much time

had elapsed since she last heard the music. That Jonah was not beside her meant he had not come back—just as she had told him not to—which set off another episode of screaming and sobbing into the bedding.

The screaming subsided, but the muffled sobbing continued. Perhaps twenty minutes later, Wendy heard a voice—Jonah’s voice!—softly calling, “Wendy, are you OK?”

Before she could clear her head enough to reply, Jonah softly asked, “Are you alone? Is it OK if I come in there?”

“What do you mean, am I al—” Wendy burst into sobs before she could continue.

She felt Jonah’s arms encircling her and leaned gratefully against him, as he said, “Well, I thought maybe you wanted me to stay away because you had somebody else you wanted to be with. I didn’t want to interfere.”

“Jonah! Did you want me to be with somebody else?”

“No, of course not. I want you to be with me, but you told me to stay away.”

That elicited more sobbing, but Wendy’s fear and resentment evaporated. Her sobs arose from feeling bad about hurting and upsetting this man who was always—really always—so good to her. Although apologies never came easily to Wendy’s lips, she managed to say, “I’m sorry, Jonah. I didn’t mean it. I was a bitch. I’m really sorry.”

She relaxed into the comforting embrace of Jonah’s strong arms, as he said, “Don’t worry, Wendy. I’m here and I love you.”

“It wasn’t me. It was the disease.”

“Yeah, I get that. I don’t like it, but I love *you* and I do understand. I know you can’t help it sometimes.”

Feeling overwhelmed by love and gratitude, Wendy thought she either had to say a thousand words or two, so she said, “Thank you,” and held her husband with all the strength her arm muscles could produce. She knew this would not be the last time, knew the ugly symptoms of her condition would rise up and cause discord and pain again, but she also knew Jonah loved her and that their love could overcome those episodes.