



BEHIND THE SONG | "Ann Marie"

by LUKE SCHLUETER

EDITOR NOTE: During the early eighties, with six teen boys and our youngest sister, our family had its share of triumphs and tribulations. Through the maelstrom of those years, our parents constantly made us mindful of the intercessory presence of our eldest saint-sister, Ann Marie, who tragically died days after her birth. In a moment of such encounter, my brother, Luke, composed a moving lullaby-song that beautifully captures our experience. It is particularly meaningful now as our eldest, Anne Marie (namesake) was just wed to Colin Stroud. Luke's "behind the song" reflection is below. [Click here](#) to hear the song.

My parents honored the memory of Ann Marie in subtle ways throughout my childhood, for example by setting an extra plate at the dinner table during formal family dinners (my mother would claim surprise at the extra place setting, as if Ann Marie were making her presence known by jogging her sense of accounting). Throughout my childhood, however, she was mostly an abstraction, a name from the past whom my parents claimed as a family saint.

As I entered my late teens and began to entertain the kind of "what if" questions that become part of the machinery of the adolescent mind, I would muse from time to time on what it would be like if I had a big sister, one who could offer the kind of sisterly advice and consolation that parents, not to mention, brothers are not necessarily so adept at providing to teenage boys.

Certainly thoughts of Ann Marie were stirring around in my head when I came home for winter break during my junior year of college. I had been casually writing songs for years, mostly as a creative diversion than a true avocation and typically as a means of working out internal conflicts. My songs have always tended to have spiritual themes and my songwriting at the time was inspired by such spiritual-minded artists as Van Morrison, Bruce Cockburn, Peter Himmelman, and the "big music" style popularized by such bands as the Waterboys and Simple Minds. That heady mixture of internal weather and external musical influences led to me write the lyrics for Ann Marie while drifting aimlessly about an empty house one afternoon.

The principal inspiration for the song was, then, a kind of self-pitying "what if" meditation that it surely would have been nice to have a big sister, Ann Marie, to help me through the trials and travails that I had recently been experiencing. But

in the process of writing the song it became something much more – a deep sense, born of desire and faith, of Ann Marie's ongoing presence in my life and in the life of my family.

Writing the song was at one level, of course, a deeply imaginative act, a creative gambit that the eternal soul of a months-old child, after having died a premature death, could actually have care and concern for the family members she left behind and for those yet to be born. And yet the needs of the imagination are closely akin to the needs of the soul and the song, which directly addresses Ann Marie in notes of plea, gratitude, and wonder, certainly fulfilled a very real spiritual need for me.

That I collaborated with my younger brother, Nathan, in putting the song to music served to further deepen my sense of the web of relationship and spiritual connectedness that ties us souls here on earth both to each other and to those who have moved on to the next world. I have always hoped, in any event, that listeners hear it less a kind of romanticized bit of wish-fulfillment than as something that reflects that truth.

"[B]eing rooted and grounded in love, [you] will have power, together with all the saints, to comprehend the length and width and height and depth of the love of Christ." Ephesians 3:17-19



LUKE & MAUREEN SCHLUETER

have been married 26 years and have three children. They are parishioners of Church of the Assumption in Broadview Heights, Ohio. Luke Schlueter, Ph.D., is a professor of English at Cuyahoga Community College, where he teaches courses in composition, literature, and creative writing. Maureen works for the Northcoast Family Foundation, a Christian

counseling practice.

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