

Christian Cappelluti

## If it hadn't been for Katy...

“From small things big things can happen”. Nonna Elena used to say this quite often and I think it is true. Events of apparently little or no importance upon which, sometimes, we do not even have much control, can turn out to have unpredictably considerable repercussions on our lives. Meeting somebody, visiting a place, or reading a book are just a few examples, but there are thousands. Even receiving a present, as I will show, might change somebody's life.

Nonna was right. Today, if I had to single out the most important thing in my life, I would immediately say music, and music entered my life in a very unexpected way, almost undesirably, but, nonetheless, discreetly. It seems funny to me, today, to think about Katy and how it all began. At that time I considered her such a small part of my life, and would have never thought that she could be so important. Now I owe her a lot.

Here follows a sequence of three “snapshots”, illustrating my “musical path” from Katy to nowadays, and showing how my love for Katy, and for music, bloomed. These memories mean a lot to me, they are beautiful memories, and they also prove that Nonna was right.

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### If it hadn't been for Katy...

It's Christmas Day of 1983. I am eight years old, and I am sitting on the couch in the living room of my family's apartment at 203 Via Laurentina. I am holding Katy in my arms. I must look a little funny while I smile and let my little fingers run across her neck in a somewhat childish and embarrassed way. The main reason for my uneasiness is that Katy really came unexpectedly. Five minutes ago I would have never pictured myself doing what I am doing now: trying to deal with my first guitar.

I like music, I guess I have always liked it, but my music world has always been confined to *listening* to music; listening to the songs on the radio, watching the singers perform on TV and listening to my parents' records and tapes. My only type of "musical performance" so far has involved buying the 45's of some of my favorite songs, which most of the time coincide with the title-tracks of my favorite cartoons. Even though at School they say that I have a good sense of pitch and that I can sing pretty well, I do not think that music really means anything special to me, and I still cannot understand why *mamma e papà* ever chose a guitar as my Christmas gift. Perhaps they just didn't know what to buy me and eventually they tried to be original. They really were, but the sad truth is that I would have probably appreciated a “normal” present much better, something like a toy, a game, or a bicycle.

While I keep fooling around with Katy (this is the name that I gave her right away), I start thinking that I am going to need some kind of lessons if I want to learn how to play. At the same time, however, I realize that I am not willing to spend my spare time going to a music school on a regular basis because I am already too busy with *la scuola, il nuoto* and *il catechismo*. It just seems like this guitar is going to cause more trouble than fun!

All of a sudden I am stricken with what I think is a good idea: *zio* Aldo can play the guitar!

Now I am going to do: next time I see *zio* Aldo I will ask him to teach me something on the guitar and if I see that it is too hard I will give it up. After all, I have never asked to have a guitar, and if I do not learn how to play it my parents should not be too upset.

I put Katy aside and go back to my room, to my toys.

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It is a Tuesday in the winter of 1989, and, like every Tuesday, I am about to go to Joe's. Joe is the third guitar teacher that I have in five years. After a couple of lessons with *zio* Aldo I discovered that I really enjoyed playing the guitar and soon started to look for a regular instructor since *zio* Aldo was only available every once in a while.

My first instructor was Giovanna, a nice eighteen-years old girl at *la parrocchia* who taught me how to play chords so that I could accompany my voice while singing famous pop songs. Unfortunately, after a couple of months, she ran out of songs to teach me and I had also discovered that I could easily figure out the chords to any song if I listened closely enough. I then transferred to Marco Biondi, a 26 year old guitar player who really got me into rock music and solo improvising. At the end of my first year with Marco Biondi my parents bought me an electric guitar, and this time their present was surely more than welcome!

After my second year with Marco, however, I realized that I had reached a point where I always kept playing the same type of music, and I could not notice any kind of progress. I thought that maybe it was not a bad idea to expose myself to other styles of music, and so I met Joe (a nickname for Giuseppe Candido), a nice twenty-eight year old guy born and raised in Argentina. He is my present jazz instructor.

Playing the guitar is definitely my favorite hobby, but I think there is something more which has recently started to enter my music world. It is something which I find by far more interesting and exciting: writing music. Every time I come up with an interesting idea, like an original melody or a groovy chord progression, I grab my portable tape recorder and record myself singing and playing. At first I used to find my recordings rather interesting, but lately I am not so happy about my tapes: when I listen to my music in my head there are more instruments playing! I am pretty sure that the music that I make up would sound much better with bass, piano and drums as well! Perhaps I should ask Ivano, Maurizio and my other best friends if they would like to start a band.

Good idea, I'll talk to them later. Now I have got to run to Joe's!

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February of 1994. I am in my own music studio with a rather big set of headphones covering my ears. It is dark all around me and there is nobody in the room but me. This is the way I like to listen to the *master tape* of the last song that I have written. I close my eyes and listen carefully to the sound of each single instrument to make sure that what first struck me in my head as my *inspiration* is going to be transferred onto tape as faithfully as possible.

I am 19 and writing music is what I like most in my life. Music is definitely the art form through which I can best express myself, and writing songs is the most self-rewarding experience I have ever had. In the past five years, not only did my interest and my appreciation of music grow,

but also my own music skills underwent an amazing improvement. I suddenly discovered that I have perfect pitch, and that greatly helped me to take music ideas out of my head and accurately write them down on staff paper. I have also taught myself how to play several different instruments well enough to allow me to perform on all the tracks in my songs with a multi-track recorder system. I have been a member of seven different pop-rock bands as both guitarist and singer; I was the leader of three and two of them achieved a very good recognition in the college scene. In the Summer of 1992 I attended a music course at Berklee College in Boston, reporting the highest scores in my class. Recently I have started arranging other people's songs and letting them record at my own music studio.

I now consider my songs the most precious thing that I own. I have written about seventy songs so far, having fully arranged and recorded more than forty of them, and new fragments of music keep buzzing into my brain with each new day. My songs are the mirror of myself. I write one-hundred percent of each song, from the melody to the lyrics, from the structure to the arrangements, and I am thinking of self-producing a record of my own, one day.

After listening to the last notes of my song fading out, I slowly open my eyes and unexpectedly find myself staring at something which rapidly fills me with a sense of secret joy and a little bit of nostalgia. I keep staring at that something for a while, then I eject the tape, grab my coat and leave the studio.

I cannot keep from smiling.  
Katy, if it hadn't been for you!...

*Christian Cappelluti*

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