

# How a mother changed the world through her son



Evelyn Polfuss had two sons. One became Les Paul. His name is on the famous guitar. Her older son worked in a dry cleaning store and then owned a bar. Evelyn was proud of both of her sons.

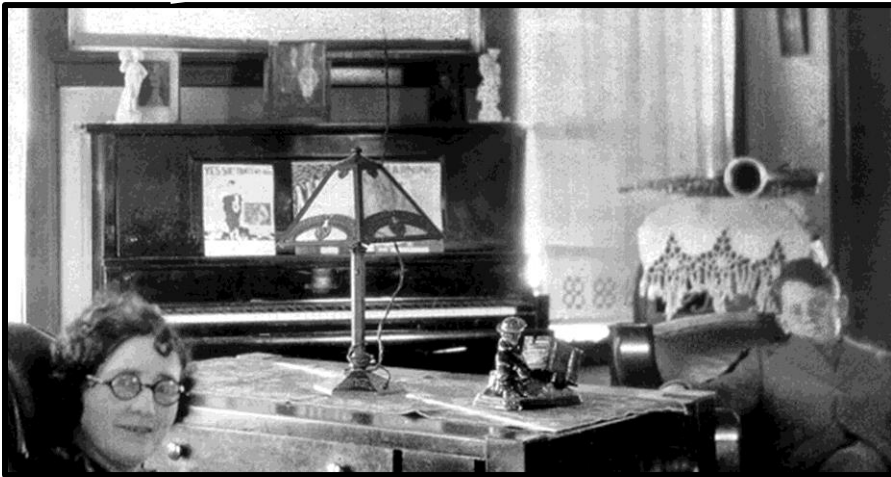
Les' parents divorced when he was five years old. His mother had \$6 a week (about \$85 in 2018) for her two sons and herself.

Les talked about his mother:

## **Mother's Challenges**

*"She would play (the piano) mournfully and cry .... She didn't know, but I was listening and watching. ...when she played, she was talking with her hands, saying she was very unhappy. I saw*

*something very strong and deep in my Mother then and the great thing is that she very soon saw the same in me. She was the biggest single influence of my life, and we were close in a way that never diminished till the day she died at the age of 101 and a half."*



## **Mischief**

*"I did a lot of crazy, stupid things when I was a kid, but rather than scold me, she always took pride in the fact that I was thinking creatively and had the initiative to do something. She always said don't look at the negative, look at the positive, and you can do it."*

## **Mother's Rules**

*"But that doesn't mean she was easy on me. If I didn't mow the lawn or make the bed just right, if I didn't do what I was supposed to do, there was a consequence to be paid for it. Either you don't get to go out and hear that orchestra, or you don't get to listen to the radio, or you don't get the crank to*

*the phonograph. She ... made the rules so they were impressive and didn't cut any slack when it came to enforcing them. That taught me a lot right there."*

### **Mother's Encouragement**

Les did a lot of experimenting with a roll from his mother's player piano. At first Evelyn was annoyed. Then she noticed how intent her son was. Allowing Les to experiment with the piano roll led to several of Les' inventions. Evelyn believed it was more important for Les to learn than for her to have a perfect piano roll.



Sometimes Evelyn did not know the answers to her son's questions. She helped Les find a person with the answers.

Radio was brand new when Les was young and he was spellbound with all he heard. When a guitar player Les admired came to town, Evelyn got tickets for Les and her. The performer was part of the musical "Showboat" where everyone wore sailor outfits. To make sure her son was noticed, Evelyn sewed a sailor's outfit for him to wear to the performance. She also found a way for them to meet the guitarist backstage. It must have been challenging for a young mother living on a very tight budget to purchase the tickets. Evelyn was determined to help her son succeed.

### **Trust**

*"She (mother) always believed I was going to do something remarkable, that was her faith, and she was willing to put it on the line. I didn't need any pushing, and she didn't worry about me getting into trouble because she believed in me. She supported me in every way, and it sure helped."*

Les never forgot how his mother supported him. Now he supports others through his Foundation.



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