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Why a Star Is Spinning In the Grave

By TIM GOLDEN

As the spiritual leader of the Grateful Dead, the guitarist Jerry Garcia went to great lengths to escape convention. And for most of his life, it looked as if he was making an immaculate getaway.

Starting out in the San Francisco of the psychedelic 1960's, he built one of the most successful bands in rock-and-roll without sacrificing his music to the commercialism rampant in the industry. He drifted into and out of relationships with women but remained publicly beloved by them all. Even after he died a rock star's death in 1995 -- his 53-year-old heart seized up during his stay at a drug treatment center -- he was eulogized as a beacon of integrity and hope in an often petty music world.

Scarcely a year after his death, however, Mr. Garcia's free spirit is haunted by a cheaply orthodox celebrity ending: new tales have been told of his drug addiction, loved ones have confessed that toward the end he went on stage not so much because he loved to play as because he needed the cash, and his widow and a former wife of his are fighting bitterly over the money he left behind.

"I wouldn't wish this on my enemy," one of his daughters, Annabelle Walker Garcia, 26, said as she stood the other day surveying a scrum of lawyers and reporters outside Courtroom E of the Marin County Hall of Justice here. "The problem is that Mom and Dad had a real hippie relationship, and you cannot explain a 60's relationship in legal terms."

The last of Mr. Garcia's three wives, Deborah Koons Garcia, 47, is nonetheless trying to do just that. Having cut off payments on a \$5 million settlement that the guitarist signed in 1993 with Annabelle's mother, Carolyn Adams Garcia, Mrs. Koons Garcia is arguing that all the talk of free love and flower children is little more than a smokescreen behind which her rival is trying to fleece the musician's estate.

"Fleece" is actually not the sort of term Mrs. Koons Garcia uses to make this point; much of her vocabulary on the subject cannot be printed in a family newspaper.

"Jerry had a variety of relationships with women, and she was the one he disliked the most," Mrs. Koons Garcia said in an interview, in one of her more even-tempered remarks on the subject of Ms. Adams Garcia, 49. "That was the thing about the whole communal deal in the 60's: you couldn't get rid of anybody."

To the Deadheads, as devout fans of the band are known, such aspersions might be blasphemy enough. To many of them, Ms. Adams Garcia lives on in legend as Mr. Garcia's main muse, or Mountain Girl, the name she was given as one of the Merry Pranksters who accompanied the novelist Ken Kesey at the Acid Tests, in which thousands of people were introduced to LSD before it was outlawed in California in late 1966.

The Dead, who fused elements of bluegrass, folk, rock and country music in an electrified improvisational mix, provided live sound for many of the Acid Tests. And not long after the Tests had ended, Ms. Adams and her daughter by Mr. Kesey, Sunshine, moved in with Mr. Garcia at the band's communal house at 710 Ashbury Street in San Francisco, a nerve center of the counterculture. (Ms. Adams was still married then to one of the sometime-Pranksters, George Walker, and Mr. Garcia had just separated from his first wife, Sara Ruppenthal Garcia, with whom he had a daughter, Heather.)

"We were nonconformists," Ms. Adams Garcia said of herself and Mr. Garcia. "We tried to avoid the establishment as best we could, but sometimes we were more successful at it than at others."

Ms. Adams Garcia, the strong-willed, articulate daughter of upper-middle-class parents from Poughkeepsie, N.Y., was for some years a loyal young wife equivalent, cooking for the household and sometimes accompanying the band on the road. Later, at several residences across the Golden Gate Bridge in Marin County, she settled into rearing Sunshine, Annabelle and Theresa -- a second daughter with Mr. Garcia -- who was born in September 1974.

Ms. Adams Garcia denies a story, told by associates of the band, about a time in 1974 when she supposedly encountered a young Deborah Koons at the home of a band member and threw her through a door. But there is little question that Mr. Garcia's family life began to unravel not long after Deborah Koons hopped on the Dead's bus at the conclusion of a show at the Nassau Coliseum and sat next to him for the ride back to Manhattan.

"I told my boyfriend I'd met Jerry Garcia, and he said, 'You've got to write him and get him to send us some acid!' " Mrs. Koons Garcia said, recounting the beginnings of the courtship with the star. "We were in the Greek islands, and he sent us a page of blotter acid. It was our barter all summer."

Mrs. Koons Garcia remained with the musician for several years, until she, like Ms. Adams Garcia before her, tired of the Grateful Dead life style and went her own way.

By the time Mrs. Koons Garcia and Mr. Garcia rekindled their relationship and finally married in 1994, he had reunited with Carolyn Adams Garcia at least long enough to marry her in a brief ceremony between sets of a New Year's concert at the Oakland Coliseum on Dec. 31, 1981, suffered a diabetic coma in 1986, been arrested for heroin and cocaine possession and had a fourth daughter, by another woman, Manasha Matheson, in 1987. Mr. Garcia's relationship with Ms. Matheson, who has also sued the estate, overlapped with another period in which he and Ms. Adams Garcia were again more or less husband and wife.

At issue in the San Rafael trial, which is expected to conclude on Friday, is whether the estate must make good on the one-paragraph divorce settlement that Ms. Adams Garcia drafted herself and Mr. Garcia signed in a quick meeting on May 11, 1993. The deal called for Mr. Garcia to pay her \$5 million in increments of no less than \$250,000 a year. Before his death in 1995, he had made 18 payments totaling about \$400,000.

As a contract, the accord is fairly straightforward. But lawyers for Mrs. Koons Garcia, who is a co-executor of the estate and a leading beneficiary, have argued that the Adams-Garcia marriage in 1981 was performed merely for tax reasons (a claim that two of the guitarist's associates have testified is partly true), that the union was never legal (a claim the judge in the case has rejected) and that the couple never amassed any community property because they never really lived together (several witnesses have testified that they cannot remember anything about the period all that clearly).

"Jerry was a drug addict," said Mrs. Koons Garcia's principal lawyer, Paul Camera, who calls the agreement a sham. "He was a drug addict to such an extent that it affected his judgment."

Mrs. Koons Garcia, who drives a late-model BMW sedan and sits in court wearing dark designer suits and a string of pearls, argues that Ms. Adams Garcia's claim is especially greedy given a valuation of the estate at just under \$7 million. Lawyers for Ms. Adams Garcia, who favors love beads and came down from Oregon in a mobile home, put the estate's potential value at more than twice that amount and argue that the settlement, paid out over 20 years, would cost the estate less than \$2 million in 1994 dollars.

As bitter as their rivalry has become, both women have at times seemed to recoil at what the trial has done to the memory of Mr. Garcia's gentle soul. No one at the court, though, has yet invoked the meaning of the type

of British folk ballad from which the band took its name.

"Grateful dead" refers to a song in which people help a ghost to find peace.