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JERSEY/NEIL GENZLINGER

A Musician Of Many Identities

FOR a while now, we at the Jersey Column have been looking for an excuse to write a little something about Dawnie, a singer-songwriter whom we have come to admire because, A., she seems to be able to manage a half-dozen different personalities simultaneously, and B., the songs on her new children's CD make our 7-year-old laugh.

That, though, didn't seem like quite enough to hang an entire column on, so we've been looking for a second subject that we could pair with Dawnie to get our 775 words. We found it in Christina S. Walsh, whom Dawnie has never met and never will in this lifetime, but whose path she will cross this month at a special event in East Windsor.

First, Dawnie, or Dawne Allynne, as anyone older than 10 or so ought to call her. If there is a Multiple Performing Personality gene, Ms. Allynne would appear to have it. She plays music for children, and her new CD, "Silly Critter Talk," has been getting noticed on places like Sirius Satellite Radio. But, on solo acoustic guitar, she also plays music for grown-ups. And she fronts a rock band called Moxie. And she's in a group called Bootsie Lewis and da Funk.

Oh, and she has four children.

Ms. Allynne, who lives in Long Branch, has been enjoying a burst of appearances lately in her various performing personas, but she has spent a lifetime building to this point. She began teaching herself guitar at 10, though shyness kept her from doing much with the ability at first.

"To get me to play in front of people was nearly impossible," she recalled.

She went to college thinking she might become an illustrator for children's books, but then came her own children, and career aspirations went on hold. Or did they? Those children, after all, needed to be sung to sleep each night.

"It was one more song, and one more

song, and then it got to the point where, an hour later, I was still in their room," Ms. Allynne said.

What she was doing, it turned out, was building a repertory, though she didn't realize it until the children grew older and she began to think about career options again.

"Somebody said: 'Why don't you do children's parties? You're really good,'" she said.

For a while she had a duo called Peanut Butter and Jam, then she went solo as Dawnie, an act she has begun pushing hard now that the CD is out and her youngest child is nearing 16. But on any given night she might also be playing a grown-up gig at places like Harry's Roadhouse in Asbury Park, or a charity show like one last weekend at the Stone Pony for teenage suicide awareness.

Her manager, Bob Benjamin, jokingly refers to her different musical identities like Barbie dolls: there's Solo Acoustic Adult Dawnie, Kids and Families Dawnie, and so on. It's the solo acoustic one who will be at City Streets Cafe in East Windsor on Feb. 20, helping Bob Walsh pay tribute to his wife, Christina.

In November 2001, Christina Walsh, only 30 years old and mother of a 4-month-old daughter, learned she had breast cancer, an aggressive variety that seemed undeterred by chemotherapy or anything else. She and her family fought hard and tried to enjoy the time they had; last June they took a much anticipated trip to Disney World. But Mr. Walsh said his wife's condition deteriorated so markedly that they had to abort the trip and fly her home by private medical jet. The bill was \$11,000.

"We immediately learned insurance wouldn't cover that plane," said Mr. Walsh, who lives in East Windsor. "As word of that spread through our friends, they in three weeks' time took up a collection and paid the bill."

In fact, there was \$400 left over from that impromptu generosity, and the Walshes decided to set up a foundation that would help other families in their situation pay the countless unanticipated expenses.

"At the time, we were talking about that she would be the spokesperson for it, because we were always counting on her getting through this," Mr. Walsh said. But that wasn't to be. Since his wife's death Aug. 25, Mr. Walsh, a probation officer, has been pressing ahead with the vision. The Feb. 20 event (tickets: 609-443-3783), his third fundraiser, will feature a half-dozen musical acts and lots of raffle items.

Sometimes, like Dawne Allynne, you defer your dreams for a while. Sometimes, like the Walshes, your dreams are shattered and you try to salvage something from them. Sometimes, two journeys that seem unrelat-