

# A biography of the great chanter/songwriter Dan Hill

Written by Patricia Turnier  
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Although Mr. Dan Hill doesn't need any introduction, in case you have been living in another planet, allow us to present a résumé of his professional accomplishments. Mr. Daniel Grafton Hill IV was born in Toronto (Ontario, Canada) the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June 1954 to American parents who, as an interracial couple, moved to Canada to escape the twin scourges of racism (including laws against miscegenation) and McCarthyism. The couple also believed at the time that Canada provided a better environment to raise their family. The internationally renowned artist Dan Hill comes from a prominent family. His late father, Daniel G. Hill III was a social scientist and public servant. Before he came to Canada, he collaborated in the U.S. with the late eminent American sociologist E. Franklin Frazier.

Dan Hill's father became in 1962 the first Director of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the first black in the country to hold this position. Mr. Hill Sr., Ombudsman for Ontario was called Canada's father of human rights. His wife, Donna Hill, was also a human rights activist when she was active. Daniel Grafton Hill's brother, Lawrence Hill, is a prominent writer. His sister, Karen Hill, is an authoress and a poetress.

Dan Hill [IV] is ranked among the world's elite singers/songwriters; he is also a musician. He plays piano and guitar. As a teenager, he admired artists such as Frank Sinatra, Count Basie, Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan. He began writing songs at the tender age of 14. He started to play professionally in small gatherings and coffee houses by the time he was 17. Two years later he signed with GRT Records in Canada and began his quick rise to fame.

Hill became popular in North America after the release of his first album entitled *Dan Hill* in 1975. The song from this album "You Make Me Want To Be" was a hit in Canada. In 1977, Hill co-wrote his mega hit "Sometimes When We Touch" with Barry Mann; he was just 23 years old. The popularity of "Sometimes When We Touch" made Dan Hill one of the youngest successful songwriters in the history of the music industry. This song became a Top Ten smash hit in the U.S. and an international success. This single went Gold in Canada.

"Sometimes When We Touch" was the first co-writing experience for Dan Hill. He was named Top New Male Vocalist in both Cashbox and Record World. He won Juno awards for

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Composer of the Year and Male Vocalist of the Year. "Sometimes When We Touch" also earned him his first Grammy nomination in 1979 for male vocalist of the year. The song was subsequently covered by Rod Stewart, Barry Manilow, Newton and Tina Turner. It is among the most covered pop songs of all time. The success of the song resulted in appearances on *The Merv Griffin Show*

, *The Mike Douglas Show* and other shows. In 1985, Dan Hill was one of the many Canadian performers to appear on the benefit single "Tears Are Not Enough" by Northern Lights.

Dan Hill made a come back in 1987 with another Top Ten hit "Can't We Try", a duet with Vonda Sheppard followed in 1988 with "Never Thought (That I Could Love)" which was number one on the charts. Since then, his work has appeared on Billboard's adult contemporary charts. A road trip to a Hill concert was the subject of the 1994 Canadian comedy film, *South of Wawa*. In 1997, Hill won a Grammy Award for co-writing and co-producing the song "Seduces Me" from Céline Dion's breakthrough 1996 album

*Falling Into You*

(which sold over 32 millions albums). "Seduces Me" was re-released on Dion's

*Collectors Series*

in 2004

It is important to note that in several concerts and interviews, Céline Dion mentioned that her favourite song from

*Falling Into You*

was Dan Hill's "Seduces Me".

This single was written with John Sheard and co-produced by John Jones and Rick Hahn. In 1997, "Love of My Life" rose to number one on the U.S. country charts. In November of the same year, Dan Hill received The Harold Moon Award, a prestigious honor bestowed on Canadian songwriters for remarkable international contributions in songwriting. In 1999, prolific artists such as the R&B singer Deborah Cox collaborated on Dan Hill's CD

*Love of My Life (The Best of Dan Hill)*.

Dan Hill's song "I Do (Cherish You)" was recorded by the pop group 98 Degrees and was featured in the worldwide hit movie *Notting Hill* (which starred Julia Roberts and Hugh Grant). Dan Hill chanted the title song "It's a Long Road" from Sylvester Stallone's movie

*First Blood*

and the theme song from

*Rambo I*

. Hill has licensed his songs for countless other Hollywood movies such as

*The Phantom of the Opera*.

Dan Hill's work is eclectic, his songs have made it to country music charts, pop charts, and so

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on. The chanter also has his own U.S. label. His work has resulted in sales of over 100 million albums. Hill has also written a best selling novel *Comeback* and a candid memoir *I Am My Father's Son: A Memoir of Love and Forgiveness*, published by Harper Collins. The book is dedicated to his late father, Daniel (Grafton) Hill III and to his mother Donna Mae Hill. The Canadian magazine

*Now*

classified

*I Am My Father's Son*

among the top 10 books of the year after its release. It recounts Dan Hill's childhood and his complex relationship with his late father, as well as parents' expectations of their children, his career as a performer and songwriter, his search for identity. In essence, it is Hill's inside look at growing up as a biracial child in Canada. Many other subjects are covered in the book and taboos are wrecked such as ageism in the music business with all the complexities in this changing industry. Thus, the book offers the reader an introspective insight into the artist's personal and professional life. On the cover of the memoir is a powerful and lovely picture of a child's hand holding his father's index finger.

*I Am My Father's Son*

is a very well written memoir. The future readers will be deeply touched by the content. This intense, critically acclaimed book illustrates the universal relationship between fathers and sons. The author, Dan Hill is a very good story teller with a wonderful sense of humour. He penned also several articles for prominent media settings such as the news magazine

*Maclean's*

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When Dan Hill stops recording and performing to concentrate solely on writing for other acts, he resolves to never again play his songs and talk about his career except when he was working. But he broke his promise and played one last song for his father the month before he went into his last coma. The song which has the same title as his book, "I Am My Father's son", is from his latest album, *Intimate*, released in 2010. The seamless single has power and grandeur; treats the complex father-son relationship with authenticity and it talks about forgiveness. The album *Intimate* unites anew producers Matthew McCauley and Fred Mollin both working with Dan Hill for the first time since 1978. Together, the trio produced Dan's first four platinum-selling albums. On *Intimate*, listeners will discover a great new acoustic version of his classic song "Sometimes When We Touch".

In spite of all his accomplishments, Dan Hill remains a down-to-earth and generous man who gives back to the community. For instance, he gives workshops to aspiring songwriters children across Canada. He also devotes his time to social causes. For example, he participated in a fundraising concert for Haïti following the devastating earthquake on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 2010. In addition, as a community ambassador, Dan is a supporter of the Canadian Diabetes Association ([www.cda.ca](http://www.cda.ca))

[www](http://www.cda.ca)

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[.diabetes.ca](http://.diabetes.ca)

). The disease affects more than two million Canadians and an estimated 246 million people globally, as well as Dan's grandfather, father, brother and himself. The latter was recently involved in a federal initiative to expand diabetes research with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation Canada-

[www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/November2009/23/c3971.html](http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/November2009/23/c3971.html)

. Dan Hill nearly lost his son to gang violence and has become involved in Stop the Violence ( [www.stoptheviolence.ca/index.php?id=8](http://www.stoptheviolence.ca/index.php?id=8)

). He is also dedicating much of his time to supporting World Vision ( [www.worldvision.ca](http://www.worldvision.ca)

), which works with children, families and communities to overcome poverty.

To sum up, Dan Hill is a legendary talented and versatile artist with more than 30 years in the music business. His body of work draws on his personal experience and themes which touch his heart. This is evident in his songs such as "McCarthy's Day", "Africville Skies" or "I Am My Father's Son" to name a few. Throughout his career, Hill has earned four number one songs, released twelve top ten records, won a Grammy Award, five Juno Awards (the Canadian equivalent to the Grammy), four platinum albums in Canada, two gold albums (also in Canada), etc. It is important to note that Dan Hill is one of the few artists in North America who was granted a Grammy and five Juno awards among several other distinctions. It is a rare accomplishment. His songs have been performed by numerous top artists such as Céline Dion, George Benson, the Backstreet Boys, 98 Degrees, Michael Bolton, Rod Stewart, Tina Turner, Britney Spears, Alan Jackson, July Black and others.

Dan Hill, the "Picasso of songwriting" is one of the most respected and accomplished high-caliber artists in the music industry. On a more personal level, he lives in Ontario (Canada) with his wife, an accomplished barrister, Beverly Chapin-Hill. The couple has one son. Mr. Hill and his spouse have written two songs, "Can't We Try" and "(Can This Be) Real Love".

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### Discography

#### Albums

- 1975 - *Dan Hill*
- 1976 - *Hold On*
- 1977 - *Longer Fuse*
- 1978 - *Frozen in the Night*

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- 1980 - *If Dreams Had Wings*
- 1981 - *Partial Surrender*
- 1983 - *Love in the Shadows*
- 1987 - *Dan Hill*
- 1989 - *Real Love*
- 1991 - *Dance of Love*
- 1994 - *Let Me Show You (Greatest Hits and More)*
- 1996 - *I'm Doing Fine*
- 1999 - *Love of My Life (The Best of Dan Hill)*
- 2010 - *Intimate*

An excerpt from Dan Hill's book *I Am My Father's Son* (p. 368-369):

"Dad, it's David. Stop leaving home. Stop leaving Canada to always go to America. Choose a country."

Ouch. Like so many Hills, my eleven-year-old son had a scary way with words. "Choose your love," David was saying. "Is it music or family?" It brought back the image of him, at four or so, looking balefully out our living room window, searching, as he did every day when I was gone, for his jet-setting father. Bev had described this wrenching scene many times to me over the phone but until I saw him there, as I pulled up our driveway from yet another songwriting journey, I hadn't understood. There he was, his small face squished up against that big bay window, waving excitedly in my direction.

On my flight back to Toronto the day after David's message, I couldn't get one particular song of mine out of my head.

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*Memories of when I was a little boy, four years old,*

*Waiting for my daddy to come home*

*Now I look into the eyes of my own son*

*Wondering what he's thinking of*

*Waiting at the window, when I come home*

*Watch his eyes fill up with joy and wonder*

*He reaches out his tiny hands, I feel the bond between boy and man*

*Memories of my mom crying, my daddy gone for weeks at a time*

*Not knowing how to comfort her*

*Face in my pillow, pretending not to hear*

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*Now I write this letter to my little boy, I'm far away*

*Not knowing really what to say, except I'm sorry, oh so sorry*

*I don't wanna make the same mistakes my daddy made with me*

*Still his voice rolls off my tongue when I say boy, protect your mom*

*Memories of my wife crying on the phone*

*Wondering when I'm coming home*

*My voice sounds detached and cold*

*Reminds me of someone that I knew*

*He had a funny attitude, when I needed him to be*

*All the things only a daddy could be to me*

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*I don't wanna make the same mistakes my daddy made with me*

*Still his voice rolls off my tongue when I say not now, I'm busy son*

### ***Memories of lying in bed with my wife and son***

*Overwhelmed by so much love, trying to explain how a man can cry*

*Yet still be happy*

*Thinking of all the dumb mistakes I've made*

*Now I understand my father's pain*

*He did the best with what he knew, I love you daddy*

*I watch my son fall asleep, and wonder what he'll think of me*

*When years from now, he sees his son*

*Reaching out his tiny hands, for love*

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Dan Hill's Official Web site: [www.danhill.com](http://www.danhill.com)



This album is available on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or .ca

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An excerpt from the song "I Am My Father's Son":

*"It's about you and me, Dad*

*It's called My Father's son"*

*I took the CD out of its casing*

*And started to feed it into*

*The stereo system*

*"Uh oh. So now you're gonna*

*Take some pot-shots at me?*

*I gotta listen to another song*

*About what a terrible dad I*

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*Was to you?"*

*"No, Dad, honestly, no pot-shots.*

*It's hard to explain- Just listen!"*

*"The strongest man I ever knew*

*I never was a match for you*

*Always wanted your attention*

*Never knew just how to get it, so I rebelled*

*Tried to be your opposite,*

*I did it well, strange but true*

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*How our lives are like a circle now*

*I'm very much like you*

*You were my unsolved mystery*

*Always barely out of reach"*

*"Memories die hard, love dies harder still,*

*I forgive you, I have no choice*

*'cause when all is said and done*

*I am my father's son"*

### ***Praise for Dan Hill's book I Am My Father's Son:***

"Inevitably, Hill's musical sensibility infuses his prose. . . . The story has a musical pulse, an exactness of comedic timing. Like his father and brother . . . Hill possesses the gift of

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storytelling, in the broad, oral, African-American tradition." -- *Ottawa Citizen*

"Took me on an intellectual, emotional and spiritual pilgrimage that instantly changed my life forever. . . . Dan Hill is my hero. His compassion, fearlessness and resilience reignited a flame in me that was almost dim. Thank you for the laughs, thank you for the tears, and thank you for your moments." --Jully Black

"Describes a complicated family, in a complicated situation, in a complicated time, and does it with honesty and verve." "[I Am My Father's Son] jolts us, like hearing a soon-to-be-classic song for the first time. The book uses the glitz of the 1970s music scene as a back drop for a soul-searching story of a father and a son -- *National Post*

"A compulsively readable memoir. It is a fine contribution not just to Canadian showbiz lore but to our country's social history. Dan Hill dishes lots of fascinating backstage gossip... [but] also strikes universal chords." – *Winnipeg Free Press*

Dan Hill's] raw memoir, I Am My Father's son, [is] a searing examination of his relationship with Daniel Grafton Hill III"-- *Toronto Star*

### Media's comments on Dan Hill's CD *Intimate*:

"...I've been to a lot of concerts and a few of them I consider to be the best from start to finish — my own hall of fame entries — and this one by Dan Hill is one of them. I don't think I've been to an event that was as moving as that was. Dan's voice seems not to have aged. It was just spectacular and it's too bad there was room for 500 more people in the Opera House."

- John Swartz, [Orillia Packet and Times](#)

"This album has to be the **album of the year 2010**, and according to **Atlantic Seabreeze**, the album is

**a masterpiece,**

with many awards in the making. The music and Dan's great voice is

**simply outstanding**

and make one play the CD over and over again. According to Dan, it

**took 15 years to write the songs**

on the CD, and most of them

**penned for other artists**

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and he had no inkling that one day he would be recording these songs. He states, that's the great thing about music-

**you never know where it may lead you”**

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[www.atlanticseabreeze.com](http://www.atlanticseabreeze.com)