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Star

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JONI
MITCHELL
BATTLES
POLIO



42 years after she
beat it as a child





SINGER JONI MITCHELL HAS CRIPPLING POLIO

SINGER Joni Mitchell is confronting her worst nightmare as she bravely battles the crippling symptoms of polio.

Like just about everybody else outside a small band of medical researchers, the honey-voiced legend had believed the disease belonged to the past — the almost forgotten days of her childhood when she was one of 600,000 kids stricken by the sometimes fatal virus that ravaged the country in the 1940s and 50s.

Then doctors introduced the Salk and Sabin vaccines and the illness seemed to vanish. But 51-year-old Joni now knows it never goes away, retreating instead deep within the cells and waiting for the opportunity to inflict its excruciating pain all over again.

Many of the original victims are being struck down for the second time. With more than 125,000 Americans afflicted by what researchers call post-polio syndrome, doctors estimate 60 percent of all survivors will be plunged back into the suffering they endured as children.

Joni's symptoms mimic the original disease, from the mind-numbing fatigue and weakness to painful joints and difficulty breathing and swallowing.

"I had polio at the age of 9," Mitchell reveals at her Bel Air home. "My spine was twisted up like a train wreck. I couldn't walk. I was paralyzed. Forty years later, it comes back with a vengeance.

The disease she beat as a child has come back to haunt her

Like a malevolent ghost from her past, the polio she beat as a child has returned to give Joni Mitchell terrifying visions of spending her remaining years in a wheelchair.

"It's like multiple sclerosis. It means your electrical system burns out and your muscles begin to atrophy. It means impending paraplegia.

"I have to guard my energy. Just like the bunnies in those battery commercials, I'm the one that's about to keel over. I'm not the one that's going and going."

When doctors offered little hope that Joni could ever escape the ravages of the illness, the singer stepped out of the medical mainstream and placed her faith in New Age therapies.

"Basically, what the American Medical Association says is, 'Lie down and die,' " she says. "But over there in Mysteryland, where I've chosen my medical aid, there's hope.

"I'm in the hands of two kinds of occult types who give me energy

transfusions by pointing their fingers at me. I've got this Chinese guy who's trying to address my DNA and tell it that nothing ever happened. Well, maybe he can do it. I give him full faith, because faith is luminous."

While Joni fights the legacy of polio, she must also try to control her well-founded fear of the stalkers who have dogged her from the early days of hits like *Big Yellow Taxi* and *Both Sides Now* to her latest album *Turbulent Indigo*. She's had to employ armed guards at her house which is surrounded by a wall.

"One guy saw me as the gateway to God, the voice of his dead sister, his wife-to-be. He also had really violent necrophiliac fantasies, which he described in detail in writing," she recalls with a shudder.

"Months would go by and nothing would happen. The guards thought I was a neurotic, but they'd leave for 15 minutes and he'd come over the wall, climb up on the roof and start screaming and shaking the windows."

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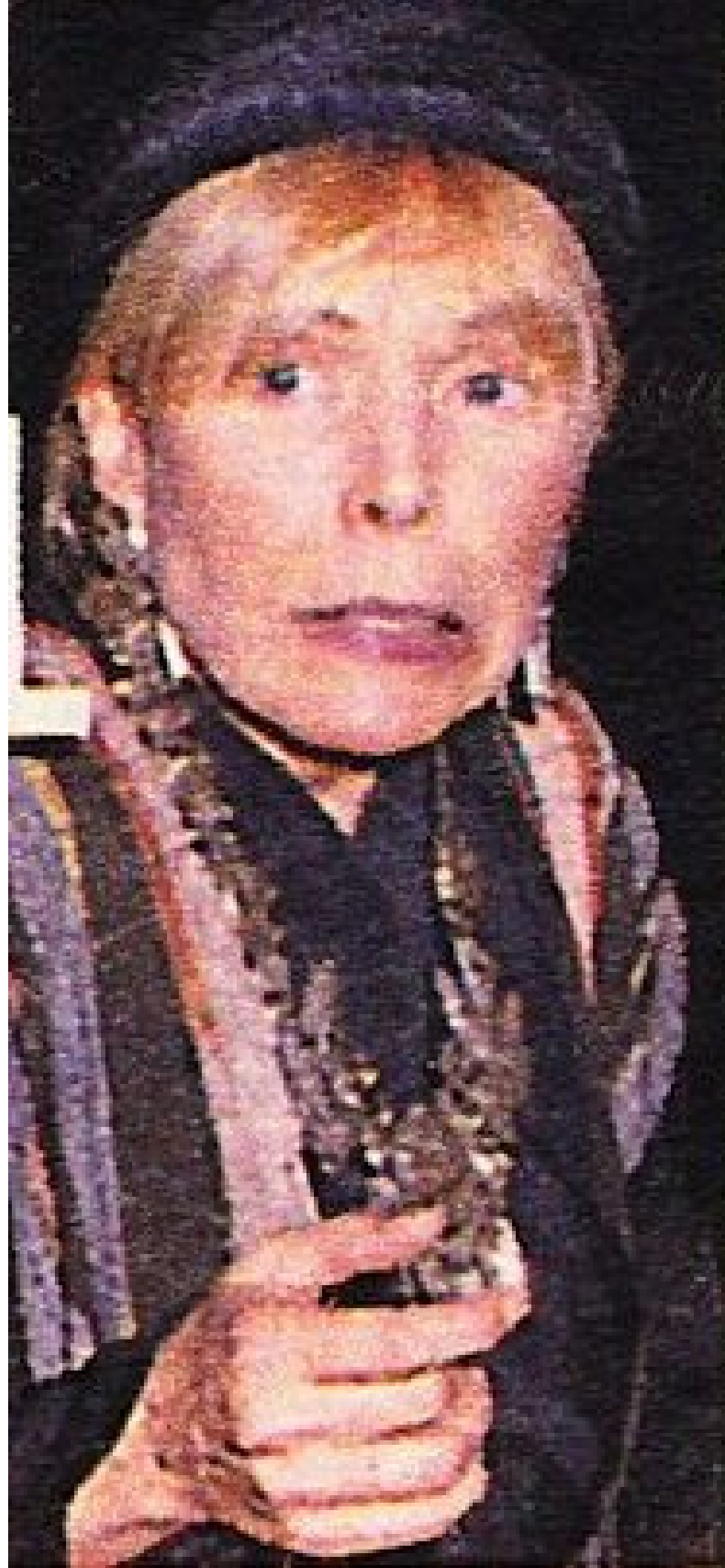
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