

## MEMORIES OF A GOOD MUSICIAN AND A GREAT PAL

You could say it began in 1970 when Don and Paula were married. I was there, cradling my guitar in the courtyard of the church, providing some ambience for the guests.



The music of the day (for me) was largely the Beatles and James Taylor, with a smattering of light rock tunes and a sprinkling of the Bossa Nova.



But you have to go back to, say, 1952 when I was 10 years old. It was a habit with the Martins to drive to Denison, Iowa (where most of the Christiansen aunts & uncles lived) to gather for the weekend every couple of months.



I soon discovered that the Runge clan was the stand-out cool group among all our very active and personable relatives. For one thing, they lived in a mini-mansion (it seemed so at my age) complete with a drive-through porte-cochere.

Even more important for this budding music lover, they had a big console stereo radio-phonograph in the living room, and a collection of big band LPs, which was musical mothers milk for me. I wanted to move to Denison and live with them!

It wasn't too long - once you arrive in your teen years you're pretty much already who you are going to be - that the two sisters in this family became my favorite pals among my relatives. This photo is me with cousin Dick, who was the only one of their siblings still at home in those years, and as he remained in Iowa for schooling and career, I knew him least of all. The sisters and I both ended up on the West Coast and some years later we were all together in Los Angeles.



Tina taught school for years, Paula carried on an avocation as a writer, and I continued in my love for music, eventually committing to that field as a performer, first as an instrumentalist and singer, then as a radio & TV show host. It was that orientation which drew me to Los Angeles for a shot at a bigger career.



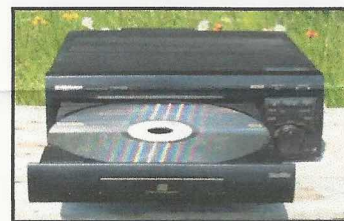
Here's where the Hassler connection begins.... Don and his wife had been personal friends of Paula and Bill Muster, who had a beautiful home in the hills above the San Fernando Valley where I had visited on several occasions before moving to L.A.



A reasonable time after their respective divorces were finalized, Don and Paula were married, a felicitous paring which lasted happily until Don's passing, some 43 years later. It didn't take Don and myself long to discover that we had a mutual love affair with jazz, and big bands in particular.

But the whole family, including Paula's sister Tina and my wife Donna Theodore, loved the movies, a subject which engendered much conversation and spirited opinionating and usually led to getting our numerous movie encyclopedias off the bookshelves to prove a point or help us with names we couldn't remember.

While I was still living in Seattle, plying my emcee trade at the Music Hall Theater, there appeared in the marketplace one of the first harbingers of the digital age - a large silvery disc the size of a 33-LP record called OmniVision Laserdisc. This technology delivered a picture sharper than any other available at the time, but it allowed the movie fan to skip to anywhere in the film instantly and employ impeccable stop-frame and slow-forward or backward controls.



In short, it was the beginning of the rainbow for serious movie buffs.

Don had a successful stereo business in Phoenix and wanted badly to showcase one of these beauties, but the company was releasing them only to major outlets at the time, such as department store chains. He did some research and found that one of those outlets was the Bon Marche in Seattle. So he sent me enough cash to cover a purchase, plus several movie discs, and allowed me to have a little fun with it before I packed it off to him for the Hassler Electronics coup. Just one of many small and enjoyable collaborations we enjoyed over the years.

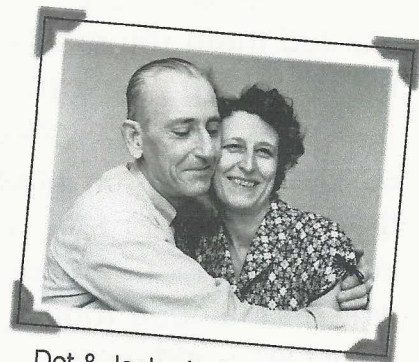
During our frequent get-togethers, the Hasslers would drive to L.A. from their home in Phoenix and stay at Tina's apartment in Marina Del Rey (I lived just a half-mile away at the beach on the Marina Peninsula). We all were very fond of our Iowa roots and loved our aunts and uncles who were still based in the Christiansen hometown of Denison.

At one of these gatherings, in a buoyant frame of mind, we decided to found a family celebration fan club that Don dubbed "The JANM&CS" - the John A. Nason Marching and Chowder Society.



John Nason was Uncle Jack, who, along with his wife, our aunt Dorothy on the Christiansen side, were the favorite aunt & uncle of us all. Whenever the Hasslers would come over from Phoenix, which was often, we would add another page or two to the JANM&CS journal, passing the book around so each could add his or her two bits along with a reminiscence of Uncle Jack, Aunt Dot or any of the extended family.

This practice continued for at least a decade until cousin Tina moved to Northern California and I moved to Palm Springs after decades in the Los Angeles area.



Dot & Jack - Isn't it obvious why we all loved them?

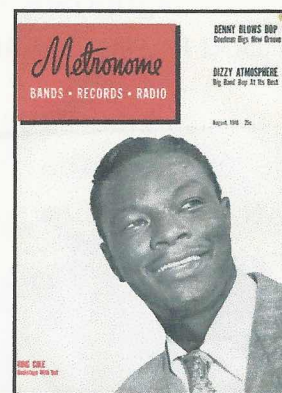


During this period of time Don and I solidified our orientation to music with each other. I had played trombone in dance bands since the time I was in high school, including a couple of professional years with the Don Hoy Orchestra when I was enrolled in the music degree program at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. After that came "the guitar years" referred to earlier in this account.

But our connection for the rest of Don's creative life was the big bands, as exemplified by the famous names of the Big Band Era, such as Harry James, Les Brown, Glenn Miller (who was born in my hometown), Stan Kenton, Woody Herman, the Dorsey Brothers, and any number of other historic music ensembles.

Like all jazz fans we would argue about the best lead men, the most exciting soloists, what band swung the hardest - all the usual mental armwrestling that was unimportant to "civilians." While the wives got involved in their own subjects there was only one landscape for Don and I ... the bass and treble clefs of the musical scale. I will miss those heartfelt communications, which often were accompanied by a couple of good cigars and a drink or two.

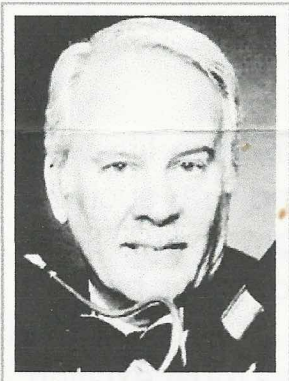
For a few years in the first decade of the new millenium Don had access to an historic collection of Downbeat and Metronome magazines, which were the two trade papers of the jazz and big band world. He sent me stacks of them and I used them for regular bathroom reading. I really loved that privilege - being able to go back to my youth (in my mind) and celebrate a time when I was totally immersed in the field of instrumental music, reliving the thrill of experiencing all my heroes live and in-person.





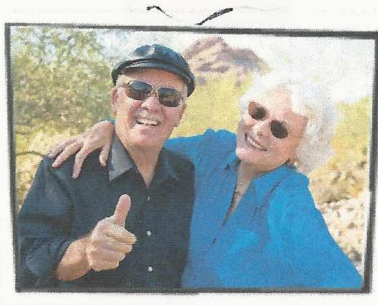
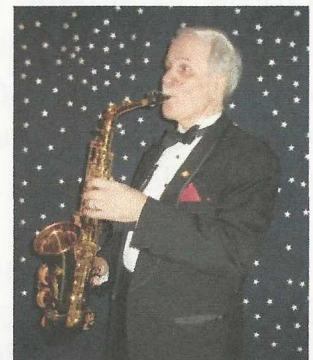
After a couple of years the source for these magazines dried up - Don's friend wanted them returned - so I packed them all and sent them back to Phoenix. Don realized what pleasure I had derived from reconnecting with that era, and he bought and sent to me a coffee-table-sized tome that was a collection of reviews and essays of George Simon, who was one of Metronome's chief writers. Wow! I ate that book up; in fact, I read it from cover-to-cover three times over the ensuing years. Don's personal insight in regard to our mutual interests set me on a path which continues today: I am currently enjoying the biography of famed alto saxist Paul Desmond, sent to me by another jazz-loving friend in Seattle.

Every man needs his space - an office, a studio, a man-cave. Don had a gem in their home on Alameda in Tempe. You can't tell from this photo but the room was spacious with a high ceiling, a spanish-style fireplace, and its own door to the outside pool patio. Don had it stocked with framed pictures, instruments, computers, and other tools of the musical trade.



In addition to his great good humor and intellectual curiosity (we used to call him the Encyclopedia Britannica), I always admired Don for his dedication to his first love, my cousin Paula, and his second love, music. After he retired the electronics business, Don returned to college at Arizona State and earned a degree in ... the BASSOON! That for me came out of left field, because (a) no dance band ever used a bassoon, and (b) it's a bitch to master. But he did, and played for years in the local symphony on that difficult instrument.

In the meantime he played regularly on dance band gigs for 20 years, was co-founder of the Salt River Sax Quartet, as well as other chamber groups which have little interest outside a small base of music lovers. But they were signposts of Don's dedication to good music and good musicianship, which he exemplified.



There's so much more, but this short testimony says all that needs to be said about a good man, my honorary cousin, and my dear friend of more than 40 years. He will be with me until I too am ushered into the next chapter of existence.

With love and respect, Cousin Don