

SSERMON: "Arthur, this one's for you!"

by Rev. Gordon Laird, Kits Band 1950 TRIP

Sunday, August 26, 1990, St. Andrew's United, Maple Ridge, B. C.

I had always loved music when I was young. I knew all the pop songs of the time. I loved the music of Harry James, Glenn Miller, and Benny Goodman. At 12 years of age my musical talents had not borne much fruit. 6 months on the violin at 6 years of age did not stick with me. I stayed with the piano until I was entered into a music festival at the Commodore Cabaret, and put down my foot with my teacher - I was not prepared for that kind of competition. So that was it for the piano.

It was at the beginning of Grade Seven, at Point Grey Junior High School (we called the school the Prison because we felt its architecture resembled Okalla) when a man with a shock of white hair came into our home room class and asked, "Who would like to be in the band?" Two of us put up our hands - Glenn Startup and myself.

From that moment on, 47 years ago, my life was permanently altered. I was introduced, along with many here, to a person who for all of us is undoubtedly our MOST UNFORGETTABLE PERSON .

In Fact, Roy Johnston, who was to be here today, but had a funeral of a fellow member of the Musicians' Union to attend, wrote an article for the Reader's Digest under the title: "My Most Unforgettable Person - Arthur W. Delamont. There is a phrase: "To know him is to love him." This does not apply at all to Mr. D. To know him was to FEAR him, sometimes to know him was to HATE him, but always to know him was to RESPECT him.

Glenn Startup and I, he with his trumpet, I with my clarinet, would be driven to General Gordon School in the Kitsilano area of Vancouver, by Mr. Woods, Ron Wood's Dad, EVERY Monday and Thursday night for what seemed the rest of our lives. Mr. D. did not believe in excuses. Don't ever say on a Monday night that you could not be there on the next Thursday. There was no excuse short of a death in the family which would be sufficient. It better be your own death. In fact Mr. D would even be suspicious that you might have arranged the death in your family!

There was room in our lives for only one priority - MUSIC. That must be Kits Band music.

When Glenn and I started a high school dance band, Mr. D. got wind of it by the next practice. Glenn reminds me that Mr. D. walked up to the trumpet row and said in his quite confidential way, "When clarinet players begin playing sax and jazz they lose their tone on the clarinet." Then he came over to our clarinet row and confided to us, "When trumpet players play jazz they lose their tone."

When we ever became upset with this rigorous routine of practice, play, practise, play, a TRIP would be mentioned. That would settle us down. In June, 1947 we travelled to Hollywood, California (How many were on the Hollywood trip?). In 1948, June 26th to July 11th we led the Calgary Stampede Parade. (How many were there?)

It was only when I looked at Walter Goral's pictures last week that I remember that I played the two handed cymbals in this Parade. "What's one clarinet more or less when playing outside? The sound is all lost!"

In the legendary Kits Band life, the top experience was to go to Europe. How many here went to Europe with the Kits Band? How many went in the '30's? You were our heroes. Mr. D. would tell us the lore of the band competitions you won until we had them all memorized. We were reminded almost every practice that we would never measure up to the bands of the 30's!

For the two years before the trip to Europe every spare moment was used for fund-raising for the trip.

For the Band Members this morning I have bad news and good news!
The BAD NEWS is that the Church offering plate will be passed to you.
The GOOD NEWS is that YOU DON'T HAVE TO SELL POSTCARDS!

We sold postcards of the band, repeatedly, shamelessly. In the middle of the concert, Mr. D would stop the music, remind the audience that we were preparing a for a trip to Europe and then send us out throughout the audience. The young, cute players were favoured for the selling of postcards - all bright and shiny in their shirts and capes, even if they had not been allowed to blow a note on the stage.

The trip to Europe altered my life forever. It gave me a thirst for Europe which has not yet been assuaged. I have since taken my family and visited some of our haunts.

"Far away place with strange sounding names, Calling, Calling Me".

When the band returned from Europe it was very hard to sustain the musical momentum. We arrived back after our 4 1/2 month trip, in October, 1950. When I asked Norm Mullins when he stopped playing his mellophone, he replied, "November, 1950".

Glenn Startup and I quit the band and continued with our careers, he as a Commercial Artist, I as a Chartered Accountant. The instruments were put away for the most part. I sold my sax. Who would ever need a sax again?

The music Mr. D. taught us, however, would never go away. Numbers we had only heard as demanding musical scores turned out to be parts of operas or plays which had a life before the Kits Band and will have a life long after: "Poet and Peasant Overture", "William Tell Overture", "1812 Overture". We were introduced to them. We had our souls touched by music and we would never be the same. There was always some religious music in our program. Mr. D. spoke of "Hymn Tunes". We didn't know the meaning behind the hymn "Abide With Me", the story behind "The Lost Chord" or the "Holy City". They were always a reminder of the days Mr. D. spent in the Salvation Army band.

"There is nothing more difficult for a band to play well than a "Hymn Tune". Why was that? Musically there is nothing demanding about playing "Abide With Me" or "The Lost Chord". The notes are easy. Thank goodness we Clarinets ("the ill woodwinds that nobody blows good") played down an octave from the squeakier high registers.

"There is nothing more difficult for a band to play well than a "Hymn Tune". Now I think I know what you meant, Mr. D.

Because when a band plays a hymn tune what is required is more LISTENING and less PLAYING. A dozen clarinets can easily be overpowered by six baritones and basses. We had to learn to listen to each other, so that the melody on the clarinets was supported by the deep rich tones of the baritones and basses. Playing a "hymn tune" the band became more like a single organism. The

blending of the instruments with staggered breathing produced a seamless fabric of music - more like the chords of an organ - like nothing on this earth!

Mr. D. knew this although he seldom explained. Mr. D. knew that music was a matter of the soul - it is soul food, and he introduced thousands of us to this ambrosia - and we searched for more of it our whole lives.

I would like to explain: I have not always been a supporter of band reunions. There were years when I didn't want to hear that yet another Reunion Concert was being planned. I thought I had outlived my need for Mr. D. and my love for Mr. D. Glenn Startup had to work on me during the early 1980's to be involved. That is why I value Glenn's help and support today. Glenn, like Roy Johnston and many others, has kept the faith for us all.

When Mr. D. was really ill a call went out that we would go and play under his window for his birthday. I did not go, but later realized how petty I had become. I phoned Mr. D. and apologized. "Gord," he said, "I'm sick!"

It was not long after that we attended his funeral at Kitsilano United Church. Roy Johnston did the narration and Brian Bolam and the trumpeters played "The Lost Chord".

I still did not bring out my clarinet and get active until one evening in 1987 Vera Delamont phoned me, asking if I would join the band playing at Delamont Park in Kitsilano. That July, 1987, I sat beside Bob Cave, as I had done in 1950 in Britain and Holland. Glenn Startup sat beside Cy Battistoni, as he had done in 1950. I met Ken Sotvedt there. It was that occasion which got me back into regular playing, this time with the Vancouver Firemen's Band.

Mr. D. knew, but never explained, that, when we had music in our souls, we would become entirely different persons. I now know that when you go deep enough into your own soul - you touch God, or God touches you! That's why the Psalmist wrote about making "a joyful noise to the Rock of our Salvation" (Psalm 95, verse 1). Because Music is one of the many languages which God understands. It may be that Music is God's Language!

When you go deep into your soul, as music inspires us to do, you became related other people in different ways.

We musicians have a very unusual fraternity. We recognize each other by our experiences, by what we love, and by the music we can make with each other. Someone who played with the Kits Band in 1970 has something in common with another person who played in the 1930's. We were taught by the same person. We loved the same music.

At their worst, we musicians bicker and complain, but at our best we have a "Deep Harmony" with each other.

Aren't we all seeking some peace, some reconciliation, some understanding, in our lives? Are we all seeking the secret of living: "The Lost Chord"?

Mr. D. we thank you for helping us in our search. Each of us owes a big part of our life to you.

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