

The Oldest Living Trombone Player

“What number would you like tonight?” He is sitting on his bed with his trombone in one hand, the phone in the other. Music is stacked on the bed to his right with the music stand in front. To his left are the address/phone book and a list of 20 to 30 names with dates penciled after some.

Every day he calls one person from the phone list and marks the date if he gets a contact. If no contact, he continues through the list of callers, noticing the date of the last call. He wants to leave a week of two between calls. Contacts are in Oregon, Washington, California, Colorado, Wisconsin and Indiana. Most are relatives and a few friends. There are two 80 year olds on the list, one a former student. He prides himself in being the oldest living trombone player. Maybe he is, maybe he isn't. We don't really care, but we do know he loves to play for others and they seem to enjoy it too. We also know it keeps him from thinking of the tumor growing in his head. He had one surgery and lost the sight in his “good eye” as he calls it. The tumor came back. Once the person answers, he visits for 30 seconds, then says, “What number would you like tonight?” My 92-year-old Dad has a list of 60 songs he can play on his trombone to serenade the caller who has received the call list in the mail. Usually he plays four to five songs, then with a quick, “good- by and I'll call again”, the session ends. The whole gig takes about 15 minutes. He started playing on the phone for birthdays, but the daily routine started as the tumor grew more quickly.

Dad always looked for enjoyment in life, and challenged young people to think. As a former mathematics and music teacher, and school administrator, he espoused math and music, but as he entered these later years, he said the most important subjects in school are music and physical education. “If you don't have your health, what can you do?”, he would say. While visiting his University of WI band and performing with them 2 years ago, he told the audience how important music is to the world. He said, “If Castro had played 3rd trombone, Saddam Hussein 2nd trombone, and Hitler 1st, the world would have been a better place because music would have settled them down.” Later as he visited his high school, he challenged the young students about true love. “Girls, if he really loves you, will he take care of you when you're 90? Be sure to ask your boyfriend that...”

He was always direct and forthright. Since I was about 9 or 10, he stated, “You need to get an education and job so that you can always take care of yourself. What would you do if your husband died or left you?” I always thought, why would I ever want to get married? I've had enough of boys with five brothers.

There are many lessons he continues to teach, such as “There are answers for almost all problems, just keep looking and never give up.” He solves most practical household problems these days with scissors and tape. When the lampshade did not provide enough light, he simple cut a whole in it. When the rash on the top of his feet needed air, he cut the top off most of his socks, but left the anklet. When my mom's nose was sensitive with a slight discharge and he diagnosed the oxygen tube was disturbing it; he cut the prong off.

My dad, the environmentalist, does not believe in wasting food, clothing or rubber gloves. He freezes dessert, sandwiches and fruit. He wears clothes until I need to take them away. He had one particular favorite pair of pants in which the knees were wearing and when I stated that I would get another pair, the holes suddenly disappeared next time I visited. It took a few minutes for me to realize he was wearing the sweatpants backwards. I won't discuss the details of the rubber gloves; I leave that for your imagination.

His schedule is important. Everyday he fixes breakfast for himself and Mardy, his 94-year-old wife. They walk in the hallways three to four times a day. He does his “calisthenics”, rolling on the floor, doing his modified pushups. He waits on mom, and helps her to bed at night. He says he can beat

this thing through eating right and exercise...maybe he can...but the nose keeps bleeding and it's getting harder to breathe through his nose.

He had the best day ever last Sunday. His Hot Air band from Corvallis came to visit. We didn't think he would be able to play more than 20 minutes, but he hung in there the entire time 50 minutes...a 20 minute break...then 20 more. Family and friends attended with his biggest fan, Mardy, right up front beaming. She knew he could have hit that low F on the last song if they had only played the song earlier. What a blessing and what an example of life!

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