

A Thousand Words (or so) about a Picture (or three)



Bob McQuillen passed away in 2014, leaving a broad wake of happy memories and musical joy for his many friends. Rebecca Weiss, then eighteen, felt his absence in the music community and wished she'd known him. She decided that traveling to his memorial with me was the next best thing. Charlie Pilzer met us at the airport and we stopped at a diner for lunch. (Of course we did. The first of many diners for the three of us. You might say Diner is the middle name of our collective personality.)

"Mac" was a huge personality. I was one of at least 1800 people he wrote a tune for. All he had to do was meet you and he loved you already. He remembered who and what mattered to you, and when he boomed out his greeting, "Well, ANDREA! HOW the HELL are YOU?!?!", you knew your world would be a little bit better from here on.

What I remember from his memorial: our old friend Dina Blade singing "Young at Heart" (boy was he ever); an honor guard of the high school wrestlers he'd coached; so many stories, like the one where he knew all the bank tellers and would send them cookies through the drive-through for the fun of it. And, of course, there was music for hours. His

panel truck was there with its small real piano, where he'd presided over many a jam session coast to coast.

A wonderful film was made about Mac when he was in his prime. Filmmaker David Millstone titled it *Paid to Eat Ice Cream*, echoing Mac's exclamation that playing for contra dances was like being paid to eat ice cream. Back at the D.C. airport, Rebecca and I found no ice cream (it was morning, but still...), but we did find donuts (green ones, no less! Exceptional.), and we paid each other to eat them.

I think it was on this trip when Rebecca began to move, for me, from student-person to colleague and lifelong friend. Later that summer we went to Clifftop, a big Appalachian-old-time-music gathering, together. We got tired of trying to explain "how do you two know each other?" and started saying, "We're twins." In that context of 24/7 music, giddy with music where sleep shoulda maybe been, it was a statement that made perfect sense. It still does.

You've maybe heard of "twin fiddling." There's a special kind of intimacy that grows between people who make music together. It's maybe because of the faster-than-speech way ideas arise and are responded to. Maybe because of the depth of emotion in music. Maybe because of the sheer joy of being vessels together for so much beauty and mystery.

This week another titan has passed over, too soon. Frank Daley, a brilliant musician with rock-solid rhythm, a gift for dynamics, a million stories (“This one is actually true.”), a love of sharing music with kids, and a mile-wide smile, leaves a huge wake of his own. We miss him. I like to think he’s out there somewhere with Mac and they’re shooting the meaningful shit. Mac’s pretending to be scandalized by Frank playing Dancing Bear on the tenor with Bird licks, and they’re chuckling together at our narrow human view. Two kind men forming a chord.



Frank used to be my airport ride — he was that kind of friend. This morning I drove another friend to the airport for an early flight. She’s off on a retreat, a renewal, and I’m happy for her. On the way home I saw a donut shop and, well, why not stop?

And here comes the sun.



I texted this photo to Rebecca, who replied, “It reminds me of Gateway Arch.” Exactly.

And then I remembered our own airport donut photo. Look again. There’s a reason we chose to pose in front of Instructions.

There’s at least one moral in this whole/hole story, but as they say in the Jack tales, “If you want any more, you can tell it yourself.”