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WALTER HOWEN, MD BIRTHDAY RECOGNITION AND CELEBRATION DAY

Some people make their mark by being a major presence. Doc Howen did it by being here and has also done it by not being here. If you knew him over the years, you could easily recall the two-fisted piano playing at the beginning of each meeting. We can still “hear” the little riffs he used to play when **we** accompanied **him** in the National Anthem.

Speaking personally, my friendship with him persisted for the rest of his life in spite of the so-called rivalry we might have been expected to have by virtue of the professions we chose. I will always respect him for that.

Those of you who were privileged to visit the Howens at their home know his first love might not have been medicine. He had a most complete music museum in the front rooms of the house...a place Gerry always said was supposed to be her first honest-to-goodness living room but it never materialized. It’s hard to have people in for tea when there are two hundred musical instruments in the way.

Along with the collection of musical instruments, with the exception of a pipe organ like Bob Hartzell’s, Doc had the most complete junk collection in the world. His family is still looking at things and asking, “What’s this for?”

I will say this, Doc knew where every item in his home was, but it would take a team of highly trained people of every profession twenty years to do an inventory of the stuff he owned and kept in case he ever needed them. He could fix every instrument there is from a metal kettle drum to a bamboo didgeridoo.

It was hard to know whether Doc owned musical instruments or the musical instruments owned him. Paradoxically, one thing was certain, he could own them and give them away with equal ease. Better still, he could own them, fix them and give them to any kid who showed an interest in learning how to play whatever instrument he needed. His favorite thing to do on a Saturday was make a round of the garage sales and buy every instrument he could find, spiff them up and give ‘em to one of the local school music departments in hope that some deserving little music students could use them.

Cont. page 2

The fun and amazing thing about Walt's collection of musical instruments in his home was the fact he could play each with a certain degree of expertise. In fact, he was self taught on most and learned – on his own—to play the violin after he was well into his sixties. Another thing he could do as an even older man was to single-handedly move a piano. He invented several little sets of wheels and levers that made it possible for a small guy to move large objects.

Doc had a remarkable and impish sense of humor, some of which might not have gone over all that well in church, but through it all, he was essentially a pure-minded person, to be sure, and a dedicated healer of man and machine. His sense of humor extended into his inventive spirit. He invented a “non-bruising peach picker”. In this case, it was the typical can nailed on a long stick, but what was different about it was the fact he had affixed a woman's stocking (with the foot part cut out) to the can, which had no bottom, so when he picked the peach, it fell through the can and simply slid down inside the stocking, slowly enough so as not to bruise or drop it.

Speaking of a sense of humor: One day Harold ended up on the floor out of his wheel-chair, Doc quickly checked him over and came up to me and said, “Good thing Harold's OK, we would have had to flip a coin to see who was gonna give him mouth-to-mouth.”

Doc's sense of humor permeated the whole day of his memorial, from the slide show to the very end when a jazz band came marching through playing “When the saints go marching in.” You shoulda been there if you weren't...

Next week: The Golf Tournament out at Lockeford. Bring your spiked waders if this rain doesn't let up by then.

Considering how much rain we have had, I have been wondering about how Noah ended up rounding up all the animals on the planet. There is a newly discovered phenom happening called hybridization... long known in the plant world...in which a whole new animal species is created through cross-species mating. That means there are animals, mostly insects, that weren't even here when Noah began building the ark.

It doesn't matter anyway; one of the animals recently discovered for the first time is the fur-bearing lobster. I talked to a Rotarian about that who said he saw one year ago, but that he was under the influence of two fifths of cabernet at the time and everything looked kinda fuzzy.