

Saving Grace: Kathy Skinner's Music

“Band saved me.” Kathy Skinner massaged the neck of her rescue Dachshund, Cowboy. “I came from a family with substance abuse problems. My father was an alcoholic. Band gave me a home and a family. It gave structure, values, and a group of friends who were a positive influence.”



Kathy had always loved music. She had sung in church since she was a little girl. (She still sings in church.) When she was in sixth grade and the music teacher asked who would like to learn to play a musical instrument, Kathy's hand shot up. If it had to do with music, Kathy wanted to be part of it.

She had been exposed to instrumental music enough to know what the different instruments were and how they sounded. “I picked the flute because I liked its sound.”

Her elementary school didn't have a band, strictly instrumental lessons, and she looked forward to the day she could be in band in junior high.

“I loved being in band in junior high,” she said. “But we didn't march at all.” When she got to high school, her band marched at football games, but not in parades. “My high school band director said that marching in parades ruined your embrasure, so he wouldn't enter us in them.”

“When we got our new high school band director, though, he started entering us in parades. We got to march in the Disneyland Christmas parade.” Kathy's eyes lit up at the memory.

Her new band director had played with Stan Kenton, and the students had the rare opportunity to study progressive jazz with Kenton, the man who was known for creating the “wall of sound” or the “wall of brass” sound.



Kathy glowed when she shared a special memory. “We all loved my band director, and for a secret birthday present for him, we suited up in our uniforms and marched through the neighborhoods to his house. We gave him and his neighbors a surprise concert right on his front lawn.”

Although Kathy didn’t play in band in college, she sang in her first college’s choir. This choir gave her the opportunity to perform as part of the Living Christmas Tree at Disneyland.

Kathy, who went on to become a software engineer (an OSU sign is displayed in front of her home), laid down her horn until she moved to the village. When she started singing with Crystal Chimes, she met Sandy Corzatt, the irrepressible recruiter for New Horizons and the Hot Springs Concert Bands. Sandy talked Kathy into joining New Horizons. (Kudos to Sandy!) “I hadn’t played my flute in thirty years!” said Kathy. She quickly found a home in New Horizons.

Once Kathy joined New Horizons, Jackie Flowers got hold of her, asked her if she’d like to play alto flute in The Flute Ensemble, and that eventually led her to trying out for Hot Springs Concert Band. (Kudos to Jackie!)

Kathy reminisced at length about how band saved her from the dysfunction of her alcoholic home. For example, when she and her inseparable band friends weren't making music, they joined and stayed busy with various clubs at the YMCA, which she wouldn't have done on her own. They became active in the Y's Youth in Government program and got to "take over the state capital for a day and pass bills, some of which the state legislature went on to pass for real!"

When asked what advice she would give to parents, Kathy said, "Enroll your child in band. It saved me. Even my father, in spite of his problems, was glad that I was in band. After I was an adult, he said, 'Kathy, band was your saving grace.'"

She thought a moment and continued. "People should put their children in band because research shows playing in band increase your mathematics abilities. But more important than that, it gives your child something to belong to, a purpose. And it gives them music. And making music serves God."

She smiled and added, "When I make music for someone, I know I'm doing God's work."

