

Vic Donnell

Short Auto-Bio and Other Tidbits For My Friends at All Saints Anglican Church

I'm a pretty simple guy with simple loves... love of God, love of music, love of people, love of massage therapy (pain-erasure techniques), and love of good hot sauces. There are other lesser loves that you can discover as we get to know each other.

Here are a couple of ideas that are a part of me:

- With a guiding God, there are no coincidences... we just perceive occurrences/events as coincidences.
- Love and music are universal languages.
- The more I learn, the more I realize I don't know.
- I don't know a lot, but I know a little.
- Try to learn something new each day.
- Humor isn't the answer to many problems and issues, but it sure makes it easier to deal with them.
- Laughing releases endorphins... the body's "feel-good" chemicals.
- Pay it forward... Do something nice for someone.

Let's begin with when I was six years old. My parents bought a Hammond Organ... I received the six, free lessons. I learned to play by reading 3-staff organ music. It would be real simple to say, "The rest is history", but it wouldn't be near as interesting as what the journey has been to present day time, like...

At age eight, I auditioned at the Julliard School of Music, and was accepted and offered a scholarship... on piano. I really didn't like piano, a piano had only one sound and it took more effort to push the keys down. I'd been playing organ for two years and that's the instrument I really wanted to play. My parents allowed me to turn down this scholarship. As a result, we'll never know how things would have turned out had I chosen piano. Chances are, I wouldn't have followed a path that would have led me to play organ here at All Saints.

Another tidbit is I began playing the trumpet in 4th grade... it became my major instrument in college.

When I was in junior high, I studied organ with a very talented gentleman, Ray Smith. He is the person that taught me to play by chord symbols and that there are more chords, better chords available for most all songs. By that he meant that "the written chords were merely a guide and your ear can come up with better chord choices" (I make changes/better choices to the chords to each Sunday's hymns while I practice them before each service.).

Ray taught me organ via the American Songbook songs... Sunny Side of the Street, Alice Blue Gown, Cole Porter songs, George Gershwin songs... you get the idea. At the same time, I was still playing music by note. I began to realize that I could better embellish songs, using my own chords, than what was actually written. Thus began an internal struggle that I did not resolve until I was a senior in high school.

At the same time, in 7th grade, I was playing trumpet in jazz band (along with concert band and orchestra). This is where I began playing jazz and why I have such a love for that genre.

Growing up, I went to West Islip Public Schools (Long Island, NY) through 11th grade. This school system had an incredible music program. As stated, beginning in 7th grade, I began performing in the jazz and concert bands, orchestra, and chorus. In high school there was Concert Band, Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Orchestra, Jazz Band, Jazz Combo, the Dixielions (dixieland band), the Swingle Singers (like the Modernaires), Concert Choir, and Chorus. (I guess you can see why it wasn't a surprise that I studied Music Education at Northern Illinois University.)

After my junior year at West Islip H.S., my dad was transferred to Illinois. He worked for Grumman Aircraft and was involved with venter quality control of manufactured parts for the L.E.M. (Lunar Excursion Module) and the F-111 fighter

jet. Interesting note: my dad actually touched and OK'd parts that were on Apollo missions that went to the moon.

As a result of his transfer, my senior year in high school was spent in Downers Grove, Illinois. It was during this time that I realized I didn't have a passion for performing traditional organ music, but wanted to pursue jazz and pop. Therefore, I stopped studying written note music and began giving more attention to reading chord symbols and substituting my own chords.

In 1972, I was hired to play with a pop organ trio by my dear friend, Ben Champion (Ben is a world-class jazz saxophonist/flutist, performing with the likes of Dizzy Gillespie). Going on 46 years later, Ben and I still perform jazz and other music together. He lives in Live Oak, but I hope to have him join me and perform at All Saints in the near future.

1972-2005:

I performed with several pop trios (one I performed in Las Vegas with) and eventually played with a wedding/club date band. I lost track of Ben Champion in the '90s. There's more to the story, wait for it...

2002-2004:

This is the period when I was the Minister of Music at Abiding Savior Lutheran Church in Ft. Lauderdale. Aside from playing for the traditional service, I also played for the contemporary service. Besides the two services, I was requested to do several special quarterly events, which included one Jazz Sunday each year. Twice I performed "Jonah Man" (a short musical about Jonah and the whale) with help from some of my jazz friends.

In 2005, I moved from south Florida to central Florida (Sumter County). Above, I said, "Wait for it"... Well, here's it: In 2007, out of the blue, I received a call from Ben Champion (during the '90s, he had moved to Live Oak). It seemed that he had been working with a jazz guitarist, Marty Liquori, in Gainesville and Marty's keyboard player was leaving the group. Marty asked Ben if he knew of any available keyboard players. Ben told him that he had heard that I had moved to central Florida but he didn't have my phone number. Ben proceeded to call his brother in Boca Raton and have him call

one of my dear friends in Plantation to get my number. That's how I reconnected with Ben and connected with Marty Liquori.

Why is this important? I'm glad you asked. As a result of working with Marty, we have performed with many different jazz artists over the past 10 years. One of those people happened to be an incredible drummer, Clyde Connor. Clyde's significant other is named Tracey, as in the same person who played piano at All Saints. I believe Greg asked Tracey if she knew of an available organist. She, in turn, asked Clyde who wound up texting me last December (see where this is going?). This is how I came to meet Greg at the Wendy's in Keystone Heights, last December 6th, to get the music for my first service at All Saints.

Going back to one of the first things I wrote (above), "With a guiding God, there are no coincidences...". Although I may have seemed to bounce around topics throughout this writing, I think you can see how it all ties in... and now you know a bit more about me. Another time, I will tell you how God worked to get me to Abiding Savior in Ft. Lauderdale.

I feel truly blessed to have been led to All Saints to provide musical support as we worship and praise our Father. Having the opportunity to get to know you all has been another wonderful blessing, especially the Garris crew who have been nothing but helpful and supportive from Day One. Having Fr. Frank is a special blessing as he doesn't preach at us, he talks to us all according to the Word. A special thanks to George and Amy... Amy for my cup and George for my caffeine.

I will write some other interesting items in another installment, but until then, check out the Musik Korner in the Word from time to time for occasional tid-bits.

I look forward to sharing worshipping and praising our Father with you all for many years to come.

Blessings and PLH (Peace, Love, and Happiness),

Vic