

The year was 1980. The month was May. As eighth graders we were required to audition for Concert Band in 9th grade. At that time, our current teacher was considered our father. He told us we would have a new father. I remember protesting, not knowing that the “new father” heard me.

Fast forward to September, same year. We are now ninth graders. This guy held grudges! Band was HELL! Class began at 2:40 p.m. At 2:45 the band room was locked! That means if you're not in your seat, you have a zero for the day! No negotiations!! One wrong move and you suffer his wrath! Got the time mastered, let's play music! There were challenges (for seating) and section competitions every week. Fine. Then came individual exams. Well!! Mr. Austin A. Venzen, band director at the Charlotte Amalie High School has the unique distinction of giving this writer a less than passing grade for band. But I digress. In 1983-84 school year, he had formed a jazz band and was taking the band to Tennessee for a music competition. As the only girl in that band, he had to convince my mother to allow me to travel. After much coaxing, she agreed, and I was allowed on the condition that I stay with his in-laws. One unforgettable experience.

After high school and my stint in the US Army, I returned home and started working at UVI. He ran into me in the hall, and demanded that I play for his music majors for musical afternoons and student recitals. As a result, I gained a whole new family. A band of brothers.

Speaking of family, he became a big part of my family, having taught me and my daughter. He became Godfather to my grandson after predicting his gender and birthdate in 2008. That date coincided with his wedding anniversary and he was ecstatic. One of his biggest smiles was when he taught his Godson, my grandson, to play trumpet during summer camp.

Prof and I shared four years of high school band, National Guard duty, duets at weddings, funerals and church services, trios at social functions, concert band trips, summer camps (complete with operas, plays and concerts), long talks filled with advice, and late nights of dominoes and Hennessey.

I admired a lot of his interactions. I especially admired the way he treated my mother - he would always stop by just for her to see him and get his hug. Shortly before his passing, he took her on a surprise lunch date - he told her good bye without saying the words. I most admired the way he taught boys to be men, grooming them through their musical interactions. Teaching the guys to let ladies go first, but still allowing them to lift a chair.

His reach was not only in the classroom, but in churches, on the tennis court, in the community at large. His stern manner quickly melting around elementary students, but sharpening as students became older. He appreciated the elderly and showed them additional care.

After 40 years of laughter, tears, good times and bad, arguments and fighting together, my world was forever changed by his death. He was larger than life – a teacher, mentor, friend and father - and I thought he would live forever.

On February 27, 2020 - the last time I saw him - he had called me early in the day for a piece of music. I delivered the music that evening, and we shared a laugh or two. When he passed that May, I realized that his message to me was the words of that piece of music - "I trust in God, wherever He may be...my heavenly Father watches over..."

"Daughter" - Monet Davis
"The Rose Among the Thorns"