



The Taylor Times



The Newsletter with "Schmaltz"

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Fifteen Years Running

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TWAS THE YEAR BEFORE CHRISTMAS A Novel Newsletter

Introduction

It was a cold start to 2009. Unusual amounts of snow had fallen in Seattle just before the holidays and the air shivered the timbers of so many of the local squirrels whose nuts were frequently found frozen around the yard. Still, life did not stop, nor did the squirrels, and the bleak winter rapidly gave way to much milder and significantly drier days. Such began the new year, which neither the best prognosticators nor meteorologists could accurately predict.

He suggested that the Brass Band Festival in late January would be the perfect opportunity since it would provide the greatest exposure. This was certainly a good idea in theory, but little did we know there would be dark forces at work attempting to cast shadows over the event and prevent tan lines from ever developing.

Rehearsals began in earnest the first week of January, effectively giving us four rehearsals before the Festival on the last weekend. About this time we also learned that due to a

conflicting commitment in D.C. (nothing to do with elections, thank God), Danny would not be directing the band for the Fest. Instead, Steve Keene, our long-time former director, would be filling in. I had expected that Steve would direct the March and that all I would need to do was send him the score with some entertaining

explanations. I had also expected that he would make it back over the mountains (his move there had ultimately led to his permanent departure as director a few years earlier) for at least two of those sessions.

Well, best laid plans and all,



Chapter 1 *Much Maligned Music*

I had finished a piece of music, called *March Maligned*, for the brass band in October of '08, and had discussed with Danny Helseth, Brass Band Northwest's venerated leader, the possibilities for premiering the work.

Steve would only make it for one rehearsal, and since, as he'd put it, he was so unfamiliar with the piece, why didn't I just go ahead and conduct it. OK, put some pressure on me. My last conducting gig had been in high school, 40 years earlier. (Wait! Did I say 40? The jury is instructed to disregard that last statement.) Of the four rehearsals the March was only played in three of them. At the same time I was being called upon during those sessions to fill in for the guest tuba soloist that would ultimately play in the festival. It became a regular dog and pony show with me being both the dog and pony.

My nerves were a little frayed when we ran out of time during our morning practice on festival day to barely run through the March, but despite one error which to me was significant, but to most others was not noticeable (ignorance is bliss, after all) the concert went well and March Malignant met the world with exuberance. The performance is on YouTube. Search for 'Jeff Taylor Brass', type "<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nU341wucfnk>" into your browser, or go directly to my music website:www.blackdiamondbrass.com/jt-music.htm.

Chapter 2 Job Lost and Found

Music has always fed my heart and mind, but never my stomach. Income by other means, whether by employment or lottery winnings has always been a necessity, and since the latter has been elusive at best, evasive at worst, working a job has become the logical outfall in the treatment of financial stormwater. For nearly ten years my job at Elcon was secure. There had been slow times before, when we were forced to cut back

hours to save the ship, but the vessel always recovered. In February, I made the mistake of running out of work, even charging a number of days to overhead. This proved to be an intolerable action by the standards of the owner of the company, whose office was not local and who saw only green, folded to pocket-size. Almost immediately I found myself filing for unemployment and contributing to the statistics that were lost in the economic forest. But a few trees still stood.

After several weeks of the usual, checking ads, sending resumes, getting some extra sleep, I changed tactics. Early on I had already contacted former employers, bosses, contract agencies, fellow employees, and psychics and began to have some nibbles, but nothing any more monumental than the stop sign at the end of the street. Then one day epiphany struck me squarely between the eyes. Brushing off the baking soda I'd been using for antacid at the time, I inquired of my bruised brain, who would know best where the work might be? Vendors, of course... the people whose jobs it are (am?) to sell to other people who are busy. I called one of the local lighting reps I'd known for many years and after he finished laughing and saying "in this job market?" got several good suggestions from him. I found a company that needed someone with my background (though not necessarily my sleep habits) and emailed a resume. The next morning I had a phone call inviting me in for an interview. Within a week I was working again and my sleep deprivation returned. I've now been working at Parker, Messana and Associates since early April, and considering how busy they (now, we)

are I expect to remain there for the foreseeable future, barring any unexpected sleep episodes.
www.pma-engr.com

Chapter 3 *More Music Magic*

Throughout the spring I continued to write music, and practice the tuba whenever I could. As Brass Band Northwest concluded its 'primavera' concert I was finishing a piece for solo tuba and brass band called Incantations. While it did not have a program when I started writing it, a movie sort of developed around it. Imagine a group of people summoned to scare off the evil spirits that have taken over and occupied some one-time peaceful location, maybe a cornfield, wheatfield, open grassland, or baseball stadium. Their efforts to return it to its unburdened past begin with a steady chanting, a spiritual preparation of sorts, with their leader at the helm, the tuba. As the chanting stops, the tuba breaks into a solo invocation to call the spirits out. In the faster section that follows these spirits begin to surface and, with regular assault by the tuba, work themselves into a frenzy, to be finally chased from the fields in a huge clamor of sound. Momentarily exhausted, tuba leader falls to the ground as the band softly emerges to a renewed peacefulness. The tuba returns to present the halcyon theme that is warmly accepted and taken up by the rest of the band and everyone lives happily ever after, especially the team in the baseball stadium.

Once again, rehearsals were in short supply during preparation of this work, and owing to unfamiliarity with it as well as my proclivity for writing music that I think is easy but which others threaten bodily harm to me for, neither the band nor the soloist (that

would be me) sounded at their best. Nevertheless I think screwy live performances still beat the canned stuff for emotional content. This, too, you can hear in both live performance and the unemotional canned stuff at my music website, www.blackdiamondbrass.com/jt-music.htm.

Chapter 4 *Loss of a Loved One*

Life would not be fair if only good things happened all the time. One of those things that made life fairer happened in July. On July 9 I received an email from brother Scott asking if we wanted to do anything special for Mom's 80th birthday the following month. The next morning



as I was contemplating the question I received a call from brother Brad informing me that Mom had died that morning. Mom was always the strong one, always the healthy one, at least as far as we knew. Maybe that wasn't really the case, but the question will probably always remain open, answered only by the assumption that the cause was a heart attack. No matter, it certainly caught everyone

off guard with so serious a loss.

The following weekend Scott and I made it to Florida, followed shortly by Mom's sisters and brother. The memorial service was done beautifully and the gathering of so many wonderful souls, while surprising to some, particularly the funeral directors, was not at all surprising to the rest of us. Scott has done a great job of taking care of all legal and financial matters, but it is a long and arduous process. Certainly life is not the same without Mom, but then life is not ever really meant to be the same.

Chapter 5 Big Island Bound

The heat of the Seattle summer was beginning to bear down on us. The extra window air conditioner while enough to keep us comfortable inside the house, did nothing for us outside. It was time to find someplace cooler for a little while... so we headed to Hawaii.

I know, it sounds very strange, and in truth the scheduled vacation was more a matter of luck than



Green Sand Beach, South Point, Big Island, Hawaii

choice, but it is also true that that particular week was the hottest on record in Seattle in a long while, with one day even reaching 102! The big island of Hawaii, on the other hand, was in the reasonably comfortable 80s. Again life was looking unfair.

We spent the week driving and touring around the island, visiting black sand beaches on the southeast coast, green sand beaches at the south point tip, and the beautiful white sand Hapuna Beach along the west coast, north of Kona where we were staying. We took the tour to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, where Donna did remarkably well walking on very





Sea turtle on Punaluu black sand beach

irregular lava flows to get where we needed in order to watch distant lava spilling into the ocean. Another trip took us to a couple of waterfalls in and around Hilo on the northeast side of the island. Of course we also visited coffee plantations and macadamia nut packagers, as well as so many wonderful restaurants. My biggest disappointment was that I was not able to get up to the observatories on Mauna Kea. It would have been a difficult trip and not worth either the time or money for a first visit, but I'll hold to the hope that it can happen on some subsequent trip after excursions to the remainder of the world have been exhausted.



Halema'uma'u Crater, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Chapter 6 Reunioning and More

As the summer began to wind down, it was time to take to the air again. Willowbrook High School's class of '69 was holding its reunion in Chicago over the Labor Day weekend and missing this one would

have been the first in all those years. (You can do the math or regard previously disregarded evidence to determine the number.) In addition to the gathering itself, we managed to accomplish not only a visit to downtown Chicago, but a successful shoe-shopping trip for Donna. I felt the latter to be one of the major accomplishments of the year.

With a reasonably pleasant weekend behind us we headed back to



Cloud Gate, The "Bean", Millennium Park, Downtown Chicago

Seattle. We'd been lucky from a flight point of view, to have direct flights each way between Seattle and Chicago. But when, just two weeks later, we also added in a driving trip over to Leavenworth, Washington for a brass band performance, about two and a half hours across the mountains, my body rebelled. The day after the Leavenworth trip we spent time at the zoo, and I found myself running out of breath to an unusual degree. Though I felt better the next day Donna convinced me to see the doctor. Some irregular readings from the treadmill had me into imaging the next morning, where it was discovered I had a considerable number of bloodclots in my lungs, apparently the result of one or more deep vein thromboses in my legs from the recent travels. But if anyone had ever questioned the value of playing tuba, this would certainly justify it.

Had it not been for the quality and capacity of my lungs I would have expected at least a multi-day hospital stay. As it happened I was neither incapacitated nor invalidated, only punctured in the stomach by the blood thinner meds for a week then weaned to warfarin. All seems to be well now, though I have to remind myself to quit falling asleep at my computer. (There's that sleep thing again.)

5PM, 8 minutes past sunset, in the banquet room of a waterfront restaurant in Ballard (Anthony's), north of downtown Seattle. We'd figured that even if the weather was bad, the full picture window views of Puget Sound would still be nice. As it turned out, however, we were blessed by the one day in November when the sky was clear and the sun shone. All 27 people there (including the bride



Chapter 7 Under the Wedder

With the concerts, travels, and tragedies that Donna and I had already experienced during the year, most people would probably assume that we were tired and just wanted to take the rest of it off, but instead we chose to make sure it would include whatever else we could manage to cram into it, so we got married.

We planned it for November 1, three days before the license was due to expire. In the search for good weather in Seattle, November is not a month to consider. Nevertheless, on a very longshot, we'd scheduled it for

and groom) were wowed by the sunset. My brass quintet had offered to play for our wedding if it ever happened and I was not remiss in taking them up on it, even writing the processional and celebratory music for the ceremony. The restaurant did a



truly first-rate job in every way, from the comfortable setup to the fantastic food. I can't give them credit for the sunset, but will say they provided us a spectacular view of it. And Donna's parents are to be most gratefully thanked for setting it all up, even if Dad did ultimately break the bride and groom from the cake. (Don't worry, Dad, it's been repaired.)

Chapter 8 *Loco in Cabo*

The wedding happened very quickly. We decided in September to do it, and it was done by November. A Thanksgiving week trip to Los Cabos, Mexico, had been slated since May, and so could not officially qualify as a honeymoon trip without some premonition that a wedding would occur and that it would happen



Seal Rock at the Arch, Cabo San Lucas, BCS, Mexico

when it did. But premonitions have happened before and I haven't necessarily been a part of them, so I'll just have to let this one go.

Our 'honeymoon', then, took us to the Worldmark Coral Baja, just outside San Jose del Cabo. During the week we took in the sights and restaurants of San Jose, Cabo San

Lucas, and La Paz, including the requisite time share presentation to get our discounted auto rental and excursion gifts. This took us in the glass bottom boat to the Arch and Lover's Beach. One evening Donna did a remarkable job walking nearly three miles into town for dinner and back. She was not terribly happy about it, but it was nevertheless a great accomplishment which helped significantly to improve her legs. We found one of the best restaurants anywhere in Cynthia's, inexpensive goods and food at the local Mega, and enjoyed relaxing times on the beach and by the pool. And in another of life's unfairnesses it would all have to happen during the coldest days Seattle had



Moon over Divorce Beach, Cabo San Lucas

seen since the beginning of this newsletter. This was our luck.



Hanging out with the locals in La Paz

Chapter 9 *Frosty's Final Moments*

The last significant events of the year would happen in two solo performances I did with Brass Band Northwest of Frosty the Snowman on the tuba. And with them now behind us Frosty and the entire Taylor twosome would like to wish to all within eyesight of this letter and beyond, a wonderful holiday season and a grand new year!

