

Donna Morton- Playing the Bone at the Blue Dog



Waiting for Cajun food at the Blue Dog Café in Lafayette, Louisiana the night before the first rehearsal of The National Community Band, we asked Donna Morton how she came to play the trombone.

“All the girls who signed up for fifth-grade band wanted to play clarinet or flute. But not me,” she said. “I wanted to play something different and sit on the back row. With the boys.” Donna looked at husband Norm and laughed. He scowled. “That’s why I chose the trombone,” she said, and laughed again. This time, Norm laughed, too.

Donna continued, “We had an old trombone around our house. Somebody in the family had played it before... I’m not sure who. When asked if she would have selected clarinet or flute if a trombone hadn’t been resident in the house, she gave us a look of mock disdain and said, “No. I’d still have wanted a trombone.”

But little fifth-grade Donna’s arms were too short to reach sixth and seventh position on the horn. “My band director had to put an extension on my horn so I could reach far enough.”

Donna played until mid-year of her senior year of high school. “I always wanted to be a teacher. That’s all I ever wanted to be,” said the retired second-grade teacher of 33 years. “In high school, if you had two open class periods together, you could be a teacher’s assistant at the elementary school. I had one open class period and then band, so I gave up band.” She shrugged her shoulders. “My band director wasn’t very happy with me.” *We suspect not.*

Donna didn’t play again for thirty years. Norm started playing his tuba, also after a lengthy time off. (We’ll save the story of the music major with the yellow plastic tuba for another time...) He began to

play with a band and encouraged Donna to join, too. She declined. Her trombone lay pitiful, lonesome, and tarnished in the basement.

Time passed. Along came Christmas. Donna walked into the living room on Christmas morning, and behold! On top of the tree sat an angel, and under the tree sat her trombone case. “Norm had sneaked it out of the house and had it completely restored for me!” But still Donna turned down Norm’s invitation to join the band.

He asked her again when the band had an upcoming Memorial Day service at the cemetery. She declined. Sneaky Donna....

Behind Norm’s back, she contacted the band leader. “Can you get me the music for the upcoming memorial service? If you can, I’ll practice in secret and surprise Norm by coming.”

The conductor delighted in spreading the word among the rest of the players. Everyone knew that Donna was coming to play... except Norm.

That day, Donna hid her trombone in the trunk of the car. She drove Norm and his tuba to the rehearsal venue. Then she waved goodbye and drove around the block and back to the High School building. The band members tittered as they waited for Norm’s Surprise.



Norm’s eyes bugged out as Donna walked through the door, trombone and music in hand. She played at that Memorial Day event, and she’s never stopped playing, now playing in not only the Hot Springs Concert Band but also in the Village Big Band and at church. She also directs The PEO Singers.

Donna. She started playing trombone to meet the boys who played the big horns. Then she started playing again thirty years later for the love of one old man who played the biggest horn of all, the tuba. And they’ve been playing together happily ever after.