

## **MUSIC** - by Sam Seabright

### **The Accordion**

I had a strong right arm.

My mother had visions of me being a great accordionist, perhaps even playing in a famous accordion band. She had dad buy me a “beginner” accordion and started some lessons for me. Perhaps I even became a little (*very little!*) proficient with it.

So then, she had dad buy me a professional accordion and signed me up for better lessons. The lessons were on Saturdays, across the river at Bellaire, Ohio, and the teacher was Dino Belli.

We did not have a car. Mom and I took turns carrying the accordion in its case a mile to the toll bridge across the Ohio River, carrying it across the bridge, and carrying it several blocks to Dino’s place. It seems the toughest part of the journey was carrying it up to the second floor studio.

When the lesson was finished, we packed up the instrument and carried it back across the river and home. Much of the time, I carried it with my right arm, saving my left arm for working the buttons and bellows of the accordion.

Sometimes we took a small short cut; we would go down into town and take the iron stairs up to the bridge, several flights, probably 100 feet or so. That was always my job and I hated it.

Dad could see this was a bad deal. He made a two-wheeled cart designed specifically to carry the accordion in its case. I thought this was a great invention and it made the weekly trek much easier.

Finally, Dino told mom that I would never make it as an accordion player, not even an average one. Dad stopped the lessons.

But that did not stop mom. Every time relatives came to visit, she had me bring out the accordion and play it for them. She had me continue practicing in the living room while she and dad stayed in the kitchen—perhaps even they couldn’t stand it, especially dad. She signed me up to play on stage at a grade school talent show, with a large audience of parents. Mom was the only person cheering me. That was so totally humiliating that I knew my accordion-playing days were numbered.

But the good news is, I still have a strong right arm.

### **The Saxophone**

I did a bit better with the saxophone, and played the sax in several bands.

In fact, I was in the high school band for eight years—starting in the fifth grade. The high school band conductor Gabriel Angelich recruited me and I was his only music student at North Benwood grade school. He started me on the ocarina, and I soon graduated to the E-flat alto saxophone. Soon I was ready (and large enough, and still growing) to play in the Benwood Union High School marching band.

There was the same problem as with the accordion—transportation. However, the sax and case were lighter, buses started running on the main road, and I was more interested. Dad

bought me a wonderful saxophone and I actually liked to practice at home. There was band practice at the high school, and football games every Friday night.

The football games were great fun—except when it rained, where we had to go through the puddles and not break ranks. We had a pregame parade, a pregame show and a halftime show with different formations. We also played ad hoc cheer songs. We played at regional towns for “away” games, at Moundsville, Follansbee, and other places as far away as Huntington, taking a school bus and returning at night singing “100 Bottles of Beer” until we fell asleep.

Mom became a really avid supporter and joined the Band Mothers’ Club. At every football game, she sold hot dogs in the concession stand and cheered right along with the rest of us. She helped me go to Wheeling on some Saturdays and sell “tags”, collecting money to buy new uniforms. She even chaperoned on some field trips.

We formed a dance band during the off season: Mr. Angelich and Bob Hoskins on coronet, Don Morehead on percussion, and me on sax. It was great fun—but I rarely got to dance.

When football season ended, the marching band morphed into a concert band. Instead of Sousa marches, we played Beethoven symphonies and popular show tunes (the theme from *Dragnet* comes to mind). Our new director Ray Ponzio assigned me to play the baritone sax, a much overgrown version of the alto sax.

A few years after graduating from Union High, I played in the University of Detroit marching and concert bands. But during my second year, when the football team was discontinued, so was the band.

In a few more years I was living and working in Crawfordsville, Indiana at R. R. Donnelley Co. printers. There was not much to do in that small town so I joined the band that played in the city park gazebo on weekends. That was the finale of my saxophone experiences.