

Image Credit: Diann Turner



Left: Dave Jammin' it up.

Middle: Dave's Instrument Collection



Image Credit: Diann Turner

Below: Music Inspires

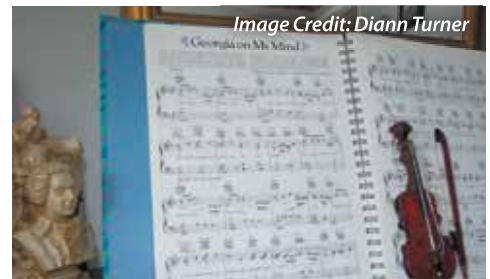


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DAVID RALPH

Bringing Music to the Hearth

By Diann Turner

It has been said that music washes the dust of daily life from the soul. Songs gain poignancy in our memories, stamp history, and highlight nature. Hans Christian Andersen wrote "Where words fail, music speaks." Music can be self expression, companionship in loneliness, a balm when in pain. Consider the sublime words of John Denver in "Annie's Song" – "You fill up my senses like the mountains in springtime!"

On a recent inhospitable wintry night, I warmed myself by a wood fire and enjoyed a pleasant evening with affable musician, David Ralph. He was raised amongst his family who listened to the radio. His brother, Joseph, acquired a High-Fidelity radio/turntable set and the music of Maurice Boyer, Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs started wafting through the house. The hankering to play music took hold and at sixteen, Dave bought his first harmonica and fought to learn "She'll Be Comin' Round the Mountain". "The harmonica is a difficult instrument to grasp", he said. "You blow your tonsils through the instrument."

Dave was reared by his grandparents back of Lansdowne. His grandpa worked in Kingston and Dave worked on the railroad in summertime. His grandpa died when he was fourteen and he became man of the house. The burning desire to learn music

was not buoyed; no one taxied you around to lessons back then. That first harmonica drew Dave in and he discovered that once a song runs through your mind, you find the note and fish for others. "It's like running a backhoe," said Dave. "You lean over and grab some more dirt!" "Will the Circle be Unbroken" is a classic example. Today, Dave owns a mandolin, two guitars, a banjo and three Lee Oskar harmonicas. Dave does not read music. He took a few lessons from Tom Case a local musician who befriended Dave, gave him the options to learn to read/play music; Dave chose to play! His beautiful mellow voice soothes the listener. He closes his eyes and sings with abandon. Dave loves the sweet sound of Bluegrass Gospel. He strums and sings the likes of "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry", "Life's Railway to Heaven", "Sing Me Back Home Before I Die" and "Little Mountain Church House."

In their 47 years of marriage, Dave and Ruth, together with their sons, Andy and Dan, have exemplified the spirit of giving in their community and Dave's music has been a big part of that. They used to make cheese every Sunday at his father-in-law's and Dave would play his banjo to time the cheese making process. He often played at old folks' homes and added his lovely melodies to soften the sadness at funeral

homes and gravesides. Art Berry was a local farmer and bus driver who played harmonica until his lungs got bad. When Art passed away, Dave honoured him with "Farmer's Song" and "Amazing Grace" at the funeral. Dave met local vocalist, Clarice Gervais, at The Lansdowne Fair at a talent show. She and Dave get together Thursday evenings to practise. Her repertoire includes Bluegrass and Patsy Cline. "Wagon Wheel" is one of her favourites. Roger Astley, Rene Perrin, and Dave jam together and do some singing. Roger plays banjo, fiddle and guitar. Dave also played at square dances in Mallorytown. He plans to retire this year and welcomes the opportunity to share his music at multiple venues. Dave clearly loves to play. He says it relaxes him. For me, those beautiful, timeless ballads are like water rippling down rushing spring creeks.

I asked Dave how he imparts his gift to the next generation. He suggested his family tires of listening to him, but I could sense his hopeful intent. His granddaughter, Caleigh, (3) finds a guitar, sits crossed-legged, and strums away! Grandson, Corbin, (6) jots words in a note book and then sings them heartily!

Louis Armstrong said, "Musicians don't retire; they stop when there's no more music in them." That will be Dave! LH