



**“Wonderful Memories”
- Donna (Caldwell) Kerley**

*As told to Dolores (Ford) Mobley
(October 2020)*

Preface

It all started as a simple visit and just a couple of questions. One afternoon, Sylvia (Braden) Hester and I stopped by to talk with Donna (Caldwell) Kerley about her family history roots around the Alma area. After all, all three of us are just “Alma girls” at heart, and enjoy area history. Plus, Sylvia and Donna have continued to be very good friends ever since they were just little girls, so that made the conversation even more enlightening (and quite entertaining) for me.

Of course, keep in mind that I thought knew who Donna Kerley was. She was DeLilah & Bud Caldwell’s daughter, and they had a store in Alma. She was Bob Kerley’s wife, and he was one of the nicest guys around Alma (or anywhere else.) And lastly, she was part of the Donna & DeLilah Show that was on WJBD every Saturday morning (and would sing “Happy Birthday” to me every year on their show ... as well as most everyone else in Marion county since listeners would call in with birthdays.)

Well - I was wrong. I mean she was all those things I remembered from my childhood, but there are so many layers, and so very many more stories within the life she has lived thus far. Actually, I was constantly amazed by the 4 different lives she lived simultaneously - daughter and wife, local entertainer with her mom, dedicated (and popular) chorus teacher, and vocalist with some of the biggest bands and entertainers – all at the same time.

But that afternoon and in conversations that followed, I was most impressed by Donna’s unpretentious nature. She is completely modest about her career and those whom she was able to work with thru the years. I LOVED hearing the stories, but I also enjoyed watching her eyes light up as she talked about her love for music and her family.

I tried to come up with a witty title for this compilation, such as “Just an Alma Girl” or “Always Singing”, but I kept “Wonderful Memories” because as she shared story after story with Sylvia and me, she’d say “Oh ... I have so many Wonderful Memories”. It was almost as though she couldn’t believe how fortunate and blessed she had been. I’m pretty sure that anyone that grew up listening to her music or was one of her students feels just as lucky.

In the pages that follow, you’ll see a handful of photos, a few old newspaper articles to accompany Donna’s stories. These don’t even begin to cover the hundreds and hundreds of shows, contests, fairs, stages and other places from which she entertained, but it gives you an idea.

I hope you enjoy reading about Donna’s stories as much as I did listening to her on a couple of afternoons just outside of Alma.

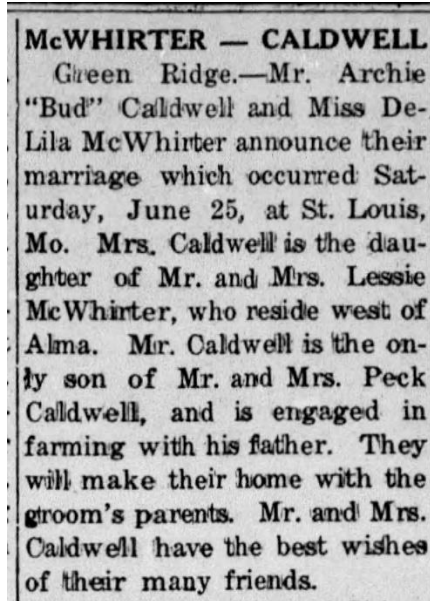
And thanks, Donna, for the memories you shared. You were right – they ARE pretty wonderful, and so are you.

Dolores Ford Mobley

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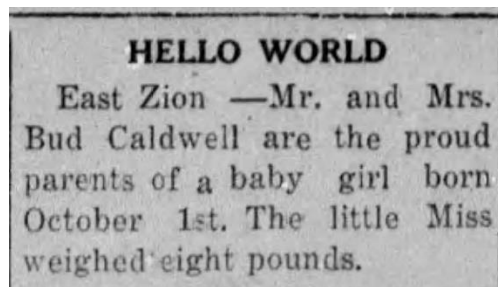
My Home, My Family, My Rock

I was born in 1939 at my mom & dad’s house just next to where this house is now. Dr. Schoonover came out to deliver me - in fact he came out and had breakfast too, which was quite common back then. They had converted the old screened-in-porch with boards and fixed up that front room for my mom - and that’s where I was born. My mom had been quite ill for some time with female problems as well as severe arthritis. It was quite the miracle that I came along.



McWHIRTER — CALDWELL
Green Ridge.—Mr. Archie “Bud” Caldwell and Miss DeLila McWhirter announce their marriage which occurred Saturday, June 25, at St. Louis, Mo. Mrs. Caldwell is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Lessie McWhirter, who reside west of Alma. Mr. Caldwell is the only son of Mr. and Mrs. Peck Caldwell, and is engaged in farming with his father. They will make their home with the groom’s parents. Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell have the best wishes of their many friends.

“The Kinmundy Express” – June 30, 1938



HELLO WORLD
East Zion —Mr. and Mrs. Bud Caldwell are the proud parents of a baby girl born October 1st. The little Miss weighed eight pounds.

“The Kinmundy Express” – Oct. 5, 1939

My parents were Archie “Bud” Caldwell & DeLilah (McWhirter) Caldwell, and they were actually third cousins. My great-grandfather hated when my parents got married because of that, and he fought tooth and nail for them not to get married. Bless his heart, but you’ll understand why I’m pretty glad they went ahead.

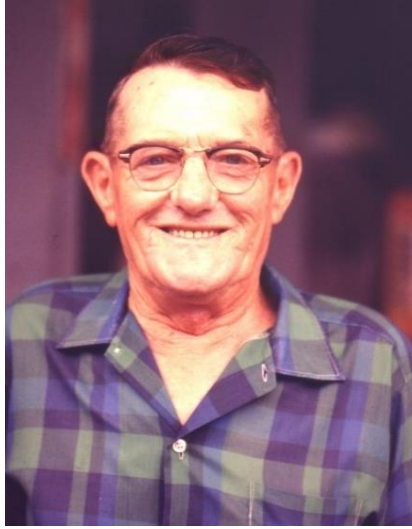


My parents, DeLilah (McWhirter) Caldwell & “Bud” Caldwell in about 1970

The Caldwells came from England, Wanda Davis started the ancestry on that line. It seems as though we were associated with some of the Kings and Queens. I have no idea where it is, but I imagine her daughter would let us see a copy. The Caldwells settled in Tennessee before migrating here.

My mom’s maiden name was McWhirter, and her mother was a Sullens, and just about everyone out on this side of Alma is related to those families. This farm has been owned by a member of the Sullens family for a long time. Before this house was here, there was an old house on the next little hill, in which the original log cabin once sat. I remember my mom saying that the remnants of the old house could still be seen when she was little. They would find all sorts of little copper pieces and other remnants in the field where the old place was located. We have thrown more copper pieces in that well than you can imagine. When we were kids, we used to throw the old kitchen utensils in there too.

My maternal grandmother was Mildred (Sullens) McWhirter. Her father, Joe Sullens (who was my great-grandfather) was raised by his mother, Eliza “Liza” J. Sullens and her sister, Aunt May. She would never let Joe keep the father’s last name, whether it was why he wouldn’t or couldn’t or whatever, because the father was a professional baseball player for the St. Louis Browns with the last name of McGraw - so Joe took on his mother’s maiden name of Joe Sullens. I think g-g-grandma Liza and Aunt May lived together in St. Louis for awhile to help take care of Joe. A room was built onto our home for my Great-Aunt May. Great Aunt May eventually moved from Salem to here, and my grandmother took care of her.



My grandparents, Lessie McWhirter & Mildred (Sullens) McWhirter

The road that goes to my folks' house down here, used to go straight on, and it also went both directions. The story I was handed down was that my g-g-grandmother Nancy (Allmon) Sullens (the mother of Liza and 8 other children), used to wash clothes for people, and the only way for her to go was to walk. She told about the time during the Civil War that she was walking one day with the laundry, and came upon this troop of soldiers walking. The soldiers were coming from Salem on to wherever, and my grandma was scared to death. She wasn't sure who it was, or what they would do, so she just kept walking and walking and didn't look at a one of them. She just kept her head down, and prayed that there weren't sticks in the way (because she would have tripped right over them), or a ditch (because she would have fallen right into it.)



This was the crew who worked the pear orchard for my Grandpa Lessie and Grandma Mildred McWhirter. The men picked pears, and the women mainly sorted and got the baskets all ready. This is the tin shed that used to be by the railroad track, and there was a sorting table in there. The door was on the south end of the shed.

There are a lot of relatives and neighbors in this photo including several uncles and aunts from the Sullens side of the family. I'm sitting on the left side on the arm chair next to my grandma (Mildred). I'm about 9 or 10 years old, so it would have been about 1947 or so. My grandpa (Lessie) is standing behind my grandma in her new chair, and my mom (DeLilah) is standing behind my grandpa. My dad is standing with the men in the middle.

The workers had given them a new chair and lamp. This was sort of during hard times, so these neighbors were very thankful that Grandpa had put them to work.



DeLilah (McWhirter) Caldwell, and Donna's future husband Bob Kerley, in an advertisement from the 1961-62 Kinmundy-Alma H.S. Yearbook as they stood in their family grocery store.

“Les and Bud’s Grocery” in Alma (named for my grandpa, Les McWhirter, and dad, Bud Caldwell) was a business in town for 12 years, including when I was in college. Everyone but Grandma worked in the store - even Bob worked there. My Uncle Ralph McWhirter used to work in Ohio at beef companies - he practically ran some of the departments. He taught Bob how to do all of that.

For Good Service and
Fine Quality Merchandise

Shop at

LES & BUD'S

GROCERY

Alma, Illinois

Phone 7178

Singing “Specials” in Church

I started singing in church when I was about knee high to a grasshopper. Although I don't remember the first time, it was probably at Given's Chapel Church just down the road from our house where we first attended church. We started attending Alma Methodist Church when I was still a little girl, and I would sing, what we called back then, “specials”.

Thru the years as I got older, our church had a youth group called MYF (Methodist Youth Foundation), and I was the song leader at district meetings and the subdistrict meetings around the Marion county and the southern Illinois area. There were many times throughout the years when my mom and I played the musical specials at Revivals and other church events. Mom would often play piano for me while I sang, or we'd sing religious or fun duets sometimes too. We also sang specials at the tent revivals held at the crossroads of the Brubaker Road / Charleston Road during the summertime. The revivals were sponsored by the churches in our Methodist church charge, which included Alma, Zion, Pleasant Grove and Cabbage Chapel. I also sang often at other churches, but they were usually in Methodist churches around the area.



1947 – Donna with the Alma Methodist Church congregation



ca 1951 – Donna with the Alma Methodist Church congregation, and my future husband, Bob Kerley is also in the photo, as well as my parents and many friends.

(names can be found for both of the above photos at www.kinmundyhistoricalsociety.org)

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Donna with her mother, DeLilah Caldwell, posing for a group photo with the Alma Methodist Church in 1957.



*High School Sunday School Class girls – 1957 – Alma Methodist Church
Back: Mrs. Mildred McWhirter (Donna's grandmother), Pat (Johnson) Hardt, Sharon Donoho,
Nora Shaffer
Front: Donna (Caldwell) Kerley, Joyce (Johnson) Wilkins, Mary Brimberry,
Becky (Hester) Jones*

School Days – From a One Room Schoolhouse all the way to Southern Illinois University

I attended grade school at the Oak Grove one room schoolhouse, and Beryl Smith was my first teacher when I attended 1st grade. 2nd grade began with Miss Mulvany (before she married a Caldwell), but then Wilma Osborn (who, of course married John D. Purcell), may have finished out 2nd grade for me. It seems like I had a lot of different teachers at school in my earliest years, and there was a lot of disruption, so I had a heck of a time learning to read. From 3rd grade until my final year at Oak Grove School, Wilma was my teacher.



Oak Grove School; Tonti twp., Marion Co., IL; Wilma (Osborn) Purcell - teacher - 1949-50

Back row: Wilma (Osborn) Purcell – teacher, Donna (Caldwell) Kerley, Kenneth Donoho, Maxine Donoho, Freda Black, Alta (Albert) Shanafelt, Joann Hanks, Billie Jo (Heskett) Allison, Florence (Donoho) Arnette

Front row: Marilyn Hanks, Larry Heskett, Mark Hanks, Charles Albert, Perry Donoho, Marilyn Alice (Shuler) Spencer, Orville Donoho

Ruby Sullens had been hired by Oak Grove to replace Wilma, but that was the year that the porch fell in on Ruby, and she broke her back, so our school didn't have a teacher. I never did take the 7th grade – I took the 6th grade twice. Back in those days they either didn't teach the 6th or the 8th and I got caught in between the years, so the next year they were going to make me take the 7th grade which would have put me a year behind.

My grades were good, so my dad and I went down to Salem and talked to Mrs. West, the County Supt. of Schools, to see what it would take to get transferred to the Alma School in town. They allowed me to go to 8th grade in Alma, and Grace Jackson was my teacher. Of course she was also the principal at the school in Alma.



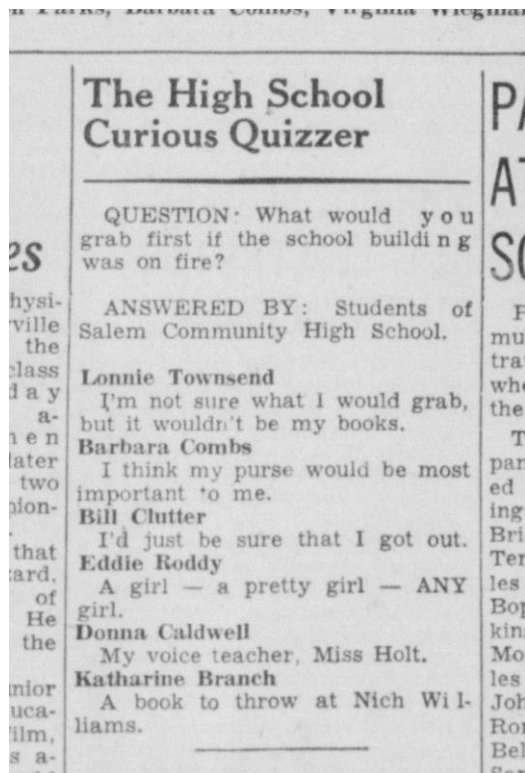
Donna and her classmates after transferring to Alma School for her 8th grade year (1952-53). One of her best friends to this day, Sylvia (Braden) Hester, was in this class too.

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After all the hoops we had to jump thru so that I could enroll at Alma School, then I decided I wanted to go to Salem for high school. I wanted to take as many music classes as I could, and at that time, the high school in Kinmundy just wasn't offering hardly any music. We found out that not only was Salem offered band, but they also offered glee club, music theory, music history, music contests and ensemble groups, variety shows, as well as foreign language. (I never did learn to play a darn musical instrument while at Salem High School, and I still can't figure out why. I had to have a minor in band, but I guess I thought that piano was good enough, and I didn't need to know anything else!) So I really wanted to transfer to Salem High School after 8th grade graduation, and my parents wanted me to also. These were many of the classes I wanted to take in school, and I would need some for college too, and really, we were about as close in miles to Salem High School as Kinmundy-Alma Community High School.

Through the years, there were several who attended Salem High School after graduating from 8th grade at Alma School. Those included the Braden family (including Sylvia), the Mazanek kids (except for John Ross Mazanek), a Diss boy, the four Hines kids, Marshall & Nellie Williams' three children, four Donoho kids, two Feather children, two Currie kids, Mary Alice Shuler, Egelstons, and Patty and Sue Humes. A couple of kids had wanted to take classes only offered at Salem that had to do with building, while Emmerson Smalley and Jim Williams enrolled because they wanted to play football. Up until the early 1940's, Alma had only a 2-year high school, so many from Alma High School would finish up the last two years of their high school education in either Salem or Kinmundy. A few from Alma would go to Salem for a year or two and then go to Kinmundy for high school or vice versa. So it was just a little different time back then when it came to starting high school in our area. All I know is that it was really scary for me because I had attended a one room school most of my childhood, along with one year in a 3 room schoolhouse in Alma, and now I was going to a much bigger Salem High School. Sylvia and I were scared to death!

After I started at Salem, I really enjoyed being part of the school chorus group. I got to compete at music contest all four years with a solo and also sang with an ensemble. We were lucky enough to get a first most of the time. During my senior year, I served as the president of the school chorus, and also sang a solo at our high school graduation. Charlotte Holt, our chorus director, picked the four best singers (soprano, alto, tenor and bass), to participate in the Illinois National Music Chorus Convention. I was chosen to represent Salem H.S. as the soprano. It was really something - all of these kids were sent from schools all over Illinois, and we practiced all day Friday, and then put on a concert on Saturday. I met a lot of wonderful singers there. Of course, Mom and Dad drove up to listen - where ever I performed they would show up. I couldn't have asked for any better parents.



“Centralia Evening Sentinel” – March 24, 1955

I had auditioned for the Muni in St. Louis while I was attending high school in Salem, but I chickened out. If I had been chosen, I would have had to start rehearsals before school was out for the year. So Mom and I talked it over, and decided that it would be best if I quit The Muni auditions. It would just be too much.

Every year, Salem High School put on a variety show, but I was never in them, because you had to be in band to participate. I don't know why I wasn't in band – I have no idea. I guess I believed since I didn't know how to play a band instrument, the band director wouldn't even consider me. But he told me later, “Donna you could have come in and we could have found something for you to play!” What was I thinking?

I guess I was pretty busy though. While I was in high school, Mom and I had the radio show in Centralia, and I would travel for talent shows, as well as singing for all sorts of events such as the Fox Hunters. Woman's Clubs, Cemetery Associations, county fairs, church events and everywhere in between.

It didn't get too hectic until college (because I was starting to perform more and more in St. Louis after I was 17 years old.) I started at Centralia Junior College (this was the predecessor to Kaskaskia College), and I attended that college for two years. I entered as a music major – and I was the first (and probably the only) student with that major at Centralia Junior College. The college even had to have planning meetings just to figure out exactly how this new music curriculum would be done. I had to learn how to play all of the instruments so I could get my degree. My music instructor gave me lessons on all of the strings, the woodwinds, brass, percussion, plus I was going to a piano teacher there. (I had to quit my piano lessons in St. Louis, and began studying piano in Centralia – more on that later.) I would just go up to his room and he would teach me one-on-one how to play the instruments – since I was the only student in the class. I would then be tested on each instrument, and he would give me my grade.

I can still play the clarinet, but I had a heck of a time playing the flute. I could also play the cello, but had a harder time with the violin, and the bass was pretty easy because it was a wider span. The trumpet was kind of difficult for me though, and I had to play the scale to pass that instrument. (My music teacher offered to sell me his metal clarinet for \$5, so I bought it – and I still have it.) I also took lessons in voice, as well as a music theory class. Since Centralia Junior College didn't have a school loyalty song, I decided to try to write one. The school faculty and students all had to approve it, so they decided to turn it into a contest, so another girl wrote one too. They ended up picking my song, and it was sung at graduations each year (after I graduated), and they continued to sing it until the Centralia Junior College turned into Kaskaskia College. Mrs. Dottie Pedtke, the Dean of Woman, wrote up the history of the Junior college and she included my song in her book.

In about 1958, the Womans Club in Centralia sponsored a big show that was to be produced by a gentleman from New York, and to be performed in town. The musical was called "Show of Shows" and included songs from several different musicals. Everyone who wanted to be in that musical auditioned for it, and I got the lead, while I was in my first year of Junior College. I opened it up with Ethel Merman's song, "There's No Business Like Show Business", and I got to do several other numbers in the show too. It was something I'll always remember. At the end, cast members would come out on the stage to applause, and I was the last one to emerge to stand in front of all of the cast. That was a nice feeling.

After I finished Junior College in Centralia, I enrolled at SIU in Carbondale to pursue a music degree in both education and performance - which took longer than some degrees since it required well over 200 hours, and had a lot of 5 hour classes. We also put on shows on campus, as well as going on tour which included a performance at the Chicago Hilton, and also several town stops around the state including Effingham, Centralia, and Salem. On this tour, I was part of the chorus, not a soloist though.

While at S.I.U., I was also the music director at the Woody Hall dormitory. The sororities and the fraternities would go together and put on a show each year, and although I was never in a sorority, I lived in Woody Hall, and the girls knew me so they asked me to help them with the show. We did a version of South Pacific one year, and I remember teaching a group of girls to sing "Bali Ha'i" and "Some Enchanted Evening".

I was in college for a total of 5 years (2 at Centralia and 3 in Carbondale) since it took a little longer for music majors to get all of those hours. My last year I moved off campus to an apartment, because they weren't allowing last year students to live on campus since there was a shortage of space with so many freshmen enrolling. I sure didn't want to go to summer school though – I wanted to come home during my summers. I was so busy in the summer with all of the fairs and other events.

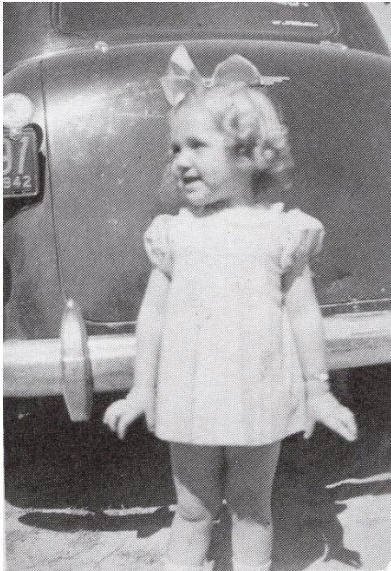
I graduated from college in 1962 with a degree in Music Education, and I was hired at Farina School that same fall. I graduated in June and started teaching in August, and worked all summer singing. I never knew what it was like not to be working someplace.

My Early Years and Entertaining, Musical Auditions, and our first Radio Show

Music did run in the family - my mom was very musical, and my Grandma Caldwell played the fiddle. To Grandma though, it was never a violin – it was a fiddle, and she played for barn dances. My Grandma Mildred McWhirter sang.

I'm also related to Howard Keele. He was a cousin on my Grandpa McWhirter's side of the family. I think his grandmother and my great-grandmother were sisters. Mame McKinney is also a relative of mine. She was in silent movies, and always wanted me to go to New York. We'd have her on the radio show when she visited us.

I guess you could say that my music career officially began at the age of 2 when I sang "You Are my Sunshine" at the Soldiers & Sailors Reunion in Salem.

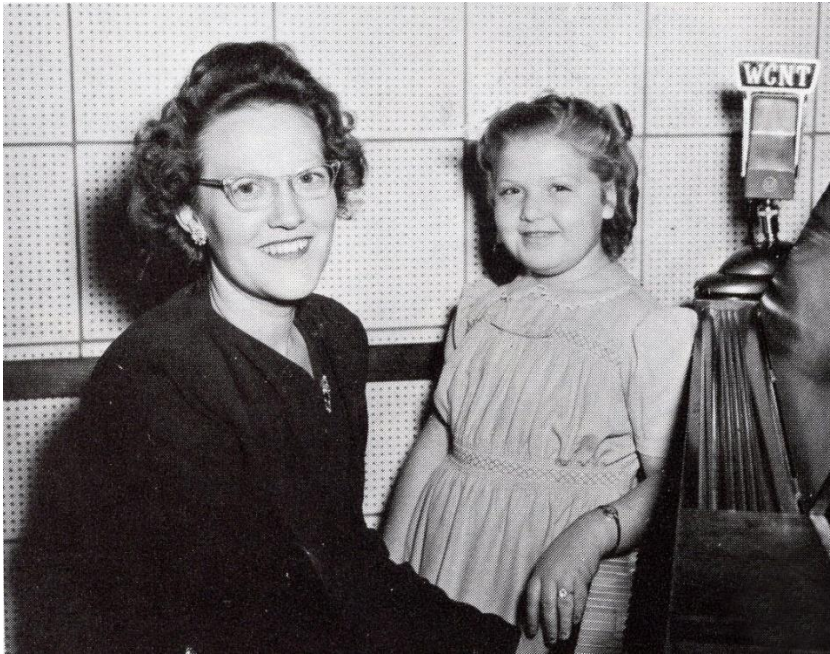


Donna at age 2



SHE'S AS PRETTY on a television screen as she is in this black and white print—or in person, for that matter. She is three-year-old Donna Caldwell of Alma, winner of six amateur song and dance contests, and the first Marion county entertainer to appear on the television screen. She appeared Saturday afternoon with the KSD junior jamboree, as the first-place winner of a recent contest. Donna, who is in the Alma third grade, is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Archie "Bud" Caldwell. She is regularly accompanied at the piano by her mother, and together they have their own program over WCNF every Friday afternoon at 3 o'clock.

By around age 6 or 7, my mom and I had our radio show at the station in Centralia. They had just built their radio station, and we were the first live talent in Centralia. We did a weekly show. I was attending Oak Grove country school west of Alma at the time, so they let me out of school early on Wednesdays. Can you imagine doing that today?



My mom (DeLilah Sullens Caldwell) and me at Centralia radio station WCNT. We performed our show on this station for 13 years.

I had an audition for Russ Severin from St. Louis, and he put me on the “Junior Jamboree” television show when I was 8 years old, which would have been about 1948. The publisher of the “Salem Democrat” newspaper was always trying to keep up with me while I was doing this and that. He mentioned in an article that I was the youngest and first musical talent from Marion County to perform on television. Of course, remember that television was pretty new back in 1948.

P. T. A. HOLDS MEETING

The local P. T. A. met in the Assembly Hall of the K. C. H. S., February 10th, at 8 o'clock with about 60 guests present. The Alma P. T. A. was invited and a very splendid joint program was given Mrs. Fred Boyd, Pres., presided.

After reading and approval of the January minutes, the Ways and Means chairman, Mrs. Rodney Schooley, presented the motion that all money should be banked and used for an up to date cafeteria when the consolidation becomes a reality. It was voted unanimously to follow those plans later on. Supt. J. T. Lewis O'Dell spoke at length in regard to the consolidation, pointing out benefits of the proposed consolidation which is in the embryo stage. Rev. E. M. Dycus, of Salem, was guest speaker and gave a very fine talk on the value of good teachers and good home training; recalling incidents in his school days which had influenced him throughout his life.

A musical program followed with the High School Male Quartette singing two numbers; Duets: Patsy Gray and Sue Hester, "Indian Love Call"; Jean Ford and Harriett "The Whiffenpoop Song"; Solo: Patsy Gray "Among My Souvenirs"; Duet: Mrs. J. N. Vallow and Mrs. Amelda Vallow accompanied by Mrs. Paulene Johnson. Donna Caldwell, of Alma, eight-year old radio star sang two numbers, "Swinging on A Star and Give Me A Simple Life." This little girl has appeared on the television on a St. Louis Station and is a talented child.

Refreshments were served in the Home Ec. Room, of coffee and home made cookies.

"The Kimmundy Express" - Feb. 19, 1948

AMVET Auxillary Visits Marion Hospital

Members of the Amvet Auxillary visited the Marion Veterans Hospital Wednesday evening and in connection with the year's program to visit the hospital each month, presented entertainment for the patients.

The program was presented by Frank Atlas, manager of Glassman's who arranged for a group from the "Stars of Tomorrow" to entertain.

The program included the following:

Quartet "Four Hits" sang "Sentimental Journey," "Easter Parade" and "Sunflower."

Donna Caldwell sang "Playmates" and "Feudin' Fussin' and Fightin'".

Joyce Bullock sang "Blue Bird Singing in My Heart";

Patsy Jo and Elaine Hughes, tap dancers, gave "Stomping at the Savoy," "Tea for Two" and "Managua Nicaragua";

Quartet sang "Merry Oldsmobile" and "Television";

Elmer Matthews and Norman Williams, accompanied by Vernie Newcomb sang "Hoodle Addle";

Group singing, "Lavender Blue" and "Cruising Down the River";

Marion Club quartet sang Hillbilly tunes;

Vernie Newcomb presented piano selections;

Sadie Bea Wilson sang "Little Bird Told Me," "Buttons and Bows" and "Three Shades of Blue," and "Quante Le Gusta."

ending the program included Freida Clifton, Doris Shell, Roxie Sammons, Wilma Hawk, Bobbie Hanna, Jackie Belford, Catherine Mitchell and Vera Hampton.

"Mt. Vernon Register News" - Apr. 15, 1949

YOUNG MT. VERNON SINGER IS TALENT CONTEST WINNER

Howard Goin, 24-year-old Mt. Vernon salesman, carried off first place honors in the finals of the six-week talent quest contest at the Granada theatre last evening.

Goin, a tenor sang Cole Porter's "Night and Day" to the delight of the bobby-soxers present in the packed theatre.

A salesman for an auto parts company, he resides on the Fairfield road, is married and the father of a six-months-old son.

Young Goin qualified to compete in the southern Illinois talent quest finals, which will be held on the Granada stage next Friday.

Last night he was awarded a \$15 first prize by Glassman's Department store, sponsor of the talent quest programs here. Frank Atlas, Glassman manager, also announced that a new outfit of clothing would be added as a grand prize to Goin.

The winner of next week's regional show here will advance to Kansas City to compete with winners from other theatres in the Fox Midwest circuit. The Kansas City winner will be given a screen test in Hollywood, with all expenses paid on a trip to the movieland capital of the world.

Bill Miller, program manager of station WMLX acted as master of ceremonies in the series and last night's finals.

Other contestants, who had each won a contest during the series were:

Donna Ruth Caldwell, nine-year-old Alma singer, pretty and charming.

Benny Jackson, Mt. Vernon high school student, an ever-popular comedian.

Sadie Bea Wilson, Mt. Vernon high school singer whose "I Didn't Know the Gun Was Loaded" made a great hit.

Susan Roberts, talented Chicago six-year-old dramatic reader with a future.

The Fire Barn Four, a quartette of high school youths, Harold Dycus, David Brown, Haynes Hawkins, and Don Neaville, whose "Fireman's Bride" brought the house down.

"Mt. Vernon Register News" - March 26, 1949

AMVET Auxiliary Visits Marion Veteran's Hospital

The AMVET Auxiliary members visited the Marion Veteran's Hospital last evening where they entertained approximately 162 patients with the annual Christmas party.

Entertainment was as follows:
Donna Lee Caldwell and her mother, Delilah Caldwell, "Candy Store Blues", Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer", "You Told a Lie" and "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town."

Hughes twins, two tap dance numbers.

Miss Gloria Jean Johnson, tap dance.

Eddie James' Orchestra, "Lady Be Good."

Howard Goin, "Lucky Old Sun", "White Christmas", "Night and Day".

Sue Ann Hart, "Talk of the Town", and "Ain't She Sweet".

Eva York, "House of Blue Lights", "That's Good Enough for Me", and two drum solos.

Eddie James and Lee Pines, piano duet.

Sadie B. Wilson "Stormy Weather", "St. Louis Blues" and "Quant La Gusta".

The numbers were accompanied by Lee Pines, pianist and the Eddie James orchestra Frank Atlas acted as master of ceremonies.

The veterans were given cigarettes and gifts.

Attending from Mt. Vernon were, Mrs. Howard Clifton, Mrs. Roy Sheppard, Mrs. Ruth Risley, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Hanna, Mr. and Mrs. Phil Baize, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Melcher, Mrs. Lester Shell, Mrs. Etta Belle Chapman, Mrs. Kirby Milt, Wayne Highsmith, Mrs. Elvin Burton, Mrs. Leota Burton, Miss Minnie Burton, Mrs. Eldon Hauk, Mrs. Frank Atlas and Mrs. Lee Pines.

"Mt. Vernon Register News" -
Dec. 21, 1949

Joey “Doves” Aiuppa comes to town, and the “Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour”

Joe “Joey” Aiuppa, from Cicero, knew my uncle Wilford McWhirter, who had a barber shop on Michigan Ave in Chicago. My Uncle Wilford had dogs and competed in dog shows, and so did Joe. As a matter of fact, Joe gave us some of our dogs including King and Red. So anyway, Joe became a good friend to the family, but there was a different side to Joe too – some I didn’t know until years later. If you look him up, you’ll see that he picked up right after Al Capone. He’d tell us, “It’s yours baby.” He’d bring his brother, Jimmy, down to our farm, as well as other friends of his including a Senator Aduchi.

The story of how they first came to Alma and to our house is so funny. It was probably around 1949 since I was about 10 years old. My Uncle Wilford have given them directions on how to get here, but, of course, that was way before interstates or road signs. This is when the old road was out here, and so you turn onto that little road off of Rt. 37. I guess my grandpa was coming home one day, and he turned on the road first, and Joe and some of his friends were behind him by coincidence. Well, my Grandpa was just moping along and looking out the window at whatever, and Joe said “Hey, look at that guy” (he didn’t know my Grandpa yet). Joe was a big joker, and full of fun, and the sweetest man (that’s what’s so hard to understand about his other life near Chicago.) Anyway he said, “You know what? We’re going to follow that guy. He knows where he’s going.” So they got all the way up to the corner where the road goes this way. Well - the driver said, “Okay, what do we do now? Should we turn or go with him?” And Joe said, “Let’s go with him.” So they followed Grandpa all the way to the house. But they didn’t realize that’s who they were looking for. So when they got out of their car, Grandpa saw these city slickers standing there. I think there were 3 men plus the dogs in that car. Well, let’s just say the atmosphere of a city hunter was a little different – for one thing there were no overalls. Joe said, “Hello there, sir. We’ve been following you, and you seem to know this country pretty well.” Joe told his name and shook hands with my Grandpa (he’d always tell his name when he met someone), and Joe continued, “We’re trying to find a Mr. Lessie McWhirter. Could you tell us where we could find him?” I guess by this time, my grandpa thought it was a joke. My Grandpa said, “Well yeah – I’m Lessie. What’s going on?” Then Joe began to laugh and then they all just started dying laughing because to think they’d been following him all the way to his house by coincidence. When they all got out, they talked, and Joe explained that he knew Uncle Wilford, and he had invited us down. Well, I guess we knew some hunters were supposed to come down from Chicago, but we didn’t quite know they were going to look like this! Fancy everything – especially their car and clothes. So by now Grandpa said, “Well, yeah, that’s who I’m looking for - Wilford’s friends. Grandpa said, “If you’re friends with my brother, you’re friends with me and my family.” So Joe came down here often after that to hunt, and he would eat supper with us every night he was here.

It wasn’t long after that first visit from Joe at our home near Alma that I had an audition in Chicago for the “Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour.” (He had a line of clothing stores – that was his big business.) We went up to for the audition, and while I was there, doing my audition, we saw Peggy Dietrich from Salem. (She had been a singer in Salem and did a lot of professional work, and eventually went to California to perform.) Peggy was at an audition too, and she came up to us and said, “Aren’t you folks from Salem?” (She was just there having a rehearsal because she had won it the week before to see if she would get 1st, 2nd or 3rd place.) The people who had won in prior weeks had to come back. But I was up there for an audition to see if I

could even pass, and I did. We had to go to Chicago about 4 times for all of this. The audition, the rehearsal, the performance, and then again if you won. I won first place which was \$75 and a 17 jewel watch engraved on the back "Morris B. Sachs."



Donna at the Granada Theater in Mt. Vernon about the same time she was singing for a performance during the "Stars of Tomorrow"

"Little Red Wagon" Girl on the Radio

Donna Ruth Caldwell, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Archie "Bud" Caldwell, Kimmundy, appeared on Morris B. Sachs amateur hour on station WENR radio and television Sunday, June 11 from 12:30 to 1:30, DST.

Donna appeared on Stars of Tomorrow amateur program at the Granada and is known to her many friends as "the little red wagon girl" and on different occasions she has accompanied a group from Mt. Vernon to Marion where she helped entertain the veterans at the Marion Veteran's Hospital.

Votes to be cast for Donna should be sent to Morris B. Sachs Inc, 6638 S. Halsted Street, Chicago 21, Ill., before Wednesday night, June 14.

*"Mt. Vernon Register-News" June 13, 1950
"Wonderful Memories" by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
- as told to Dolores Ford Mobley" (October 2020)*

Because Joe knew Morris B. Sachs, I was always worried that he had paid for me to win. Everyone told me that he didn't, and it did turn out to be a great performance, and I was kind of lucky on the talent that night as far as the competition that I was up against. While we were there, we never stayed at the hotel where the competition took place. Joe had a hotel in Cicero, and that was our hangout. It was a hotel and a bar, and he owned everybody there - and let me tell you, we were guarded like crazy.

We did so much with Joe when we went up there – and he saw to it that we just had everything we needed at all - as long as we stayed at his hotel. He would arrange for transportation into Chicago by train or whatever we needed to get around. One time I remember going to see Mickey Rooney in the Chicago Theater on a visit. Joe would pay for everything, and say those words, “It’s yours baby”, and of course we could stay as long as we needed to. But one night, it was a little late, and went down to the restaurant to get something, probably a coke, and sat down in a real nice chair in the lounge. I was probably about 14 years old and this man comes over, and propositions me. Here I am at 14, sitting there and I just look over at this other girl, and she comes running over as fast as she can. She pulls him over, and they just talk for a minute. Then he just walks off. I’m pretty sure she informed him that I was “Joe’s guest”!

Mother and I also went to Kansas City so that I could audition to be on the “Ted Mack Amateur Hour Show”. I won the audition, but soon after they took the show off of the air.

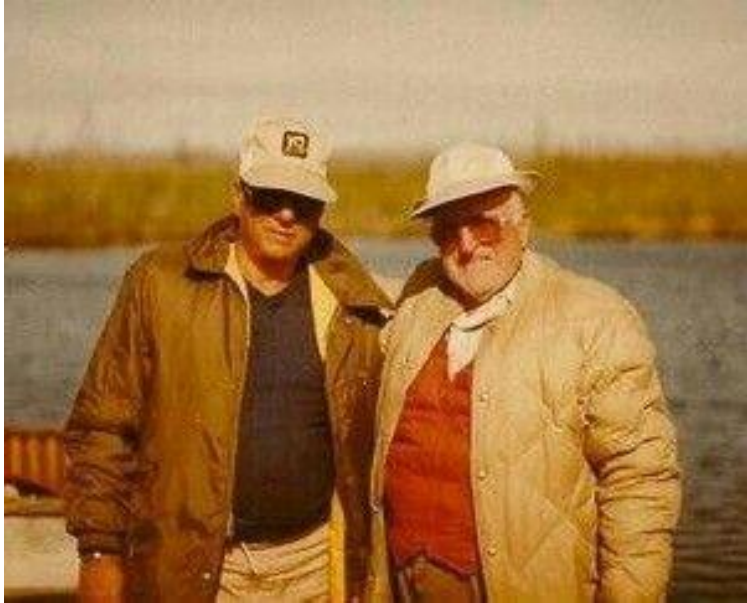
After I had won that, probably a year later, all of the winners who had one first place at the “Morris B. Sachs Amateur Hour” were invited to some big hotel & ballroom in Chicago, and we could bring 4 guests with us. It was a tribute to Mr. Sachs. That night, we also went with Joe and his wife to see a movie star at a dinner that evening. I remember going up this this movie star to ask for his autograph too, but he asked if I had a pen and I didn't, and neither did he. What was I thinking? I just didn't even know any better to bring a paper and pen with me.

One visit, Joe said to us, “Now tonight you don't have anything going on, do you? You don't have anything scheduled?” Joey had already taken us out to eat. We didn't know what it was to pay for anything – breakfast, dinner – we could get anything anytime. Mom told him, “No, we don't have any plans.” Then Joe told us, “I'd stay in tonight. You can look across the street tonight and see what I'm talking about. There will probably be some noise at the barber shop across there. There's something that's going to be going on over there. Don't be alarmed. We've got it all covered. I just wanted you to know something's going on, so don't get out on the street.” Lo and behold, it wasn't hardly anytime, and we saw cars pulling up. We heard guns. “Boom, boom, boom!” And here comes the police. I never did know what it was about. We didn't get a paper or anything. The next morning, we just got on the L train and went downtown shopping. But even then, hearing all of that, we were never afraid. I think we're more afraid now, that we were back then about things like that.

One time he wanted us to see his farm – and it was a beautiful farm. We drove in several cars on the way out there. There was one car leading the way, a second car driving Joe (with two guys in the back seat), and then WE were following that car, which was followed by a fourth car. But I wasn't afraid. We'd gone out to eat that night too with this big group of people. (I still remember that night, because it was the first time I was introduced to a finger bowl.)

Mother and I did stay at Joe's home before too. It was nothing super elaborate, it was modest living room, kitchen, etc.

One time while we were there, Mom and I went with Joe's wife, and her good-looking nephew, and we went out to a carnival and we rode the carnival rides. Joey Aiuppa was such a sweetheart to my family, and once he took us out to meet his mom. He really loved his mother.



Joey Aiuppa (Outfit Boss) with his driver and future Outfit boss Sam Carlisi.

“JOSEPH AIUPPA, 89, REPUTED MOB KINGPIN” – “Chicago Tribune” – Feb. 24, 1997

“Joseph Aiuppa, 89, the last reputed Chicago mob figure dating to the prohibition days of Al Capone, died Saturday at Elmhurst Memorial Hospital.

Identified in 1981 by the Chicago Police Intelligence Division

as “the Capo Ditutti Capi,” or the top boss of the Chicago mob, Mr. Aiuppa was convicted with four others in 1986 of skimming millions in gambling profits from a Las Vegas casino.

The conviction was considered one of the Justice Department’s most significant victories against the mob in two decades, and the scam later formed the basis of the movie “Casino.” Mr. Aiuppa served nearly 10 years of a 28-year sentence for the casino-related racketeering, in which cash was removed from the casino counting room before it was totalled for tax purposes. He was released from the Federal Medical Center in Rochester, Minn., in January 1996. In the 10 years before Mr. Aiuppa's conviction, prosecutors had charged that he and his second-in-command, John Cerone, had ordered as many as 13 underworld murders and directed a crime empire that netted millions. At the time of Mr. Aiuppa's conviction, U.S. Justice Department officials said Mr. Aiuppa was the top mob boss in the nation.

Mr. Aiuppa earned the mob nickname Joey “Doves” Aiuppa from one of his most highly publicized arrests. In 1962, he went on a hunting trip to Kansas, and when he returned, federal game authorities were waiting at his Oak Brook home.

They found 563 dressed and frozen mourning doves in the trunk of his car. He was convicted of illegal possession and transportation of the doves, but the conviction was overturned by the U.S. Court of Appeals.

In the 1920s, Mr. Aiuppa fought as an amateur welterweight boxer using the name Joey O'Brien. Reportedly he told those who questioned his use of the pseudonym that he could get better fights with an Irish name.

Cicero was long the center of Mr. Aiuppa's operations. His headquarters was the former Towne Hotel, which burned to the ground shortly after state agents raided it looking for exotic stuffed birds and other animals.

Although it was never proven that Mr. Aiuppa was connected with the illegal taxidermy, he is said to have been so concerned that the agents might have planted a listening device that he moved his operations elsewhere.”

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*

Keep on Singing

When I was in 6th grade, Mom got me an audition at the Fox Theater for a contest that was going to be at the Empress Theater. (The Empress was just a block away from the Fox.) I passed that audition, and then I was accompanied by the "Bonnie Ross Orchestra". Every night that week, I had to perform, and I had to be there by 7 every night, so I'd have to leave school to get there in time. Each night that week (Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday), I sang with the band, and won from the applause from the audience. (I remember there was a girl named Patton, and we shared the same dressing room. She danced at the Muni for several years.) Then on Saturday, they had all of the winners who had competed back again, because they had new talent every night. There was all sorts of talent - singers, tap dancers, acrobats, and competitors of all different ages. I was singing every night so that I could hold my position, and then I won that. All of the winners returned later (like on the Morris B. Sachs Hour), and we all performed together. I don't think there was a winner from that night, and they called us "The Stars of Tomorrow." By this time, I would have been 12 or 13 years old.

Through all these years, I had costumes for each of these places in which I performed. Mom would make all of these costumes - she sewed everything!

I competed in talent shows everywhere. I sang just at so many places and events - Coon Hunters association, company dinners, the Reunions in Salem, and every school play - anything locally at all. We worked country and western bands around here too. We went everywhere and played with everyone.

My mom couldn't read music, but she could play the piano by ear. When I about 7 years old, Mom took me into Alma to take piano lessons from Ruth Wilson. When I got home to practice each after each lesson, my mom would play the song for me first, and then I would practice. The problem was, I was playing just like my mom did - by ear. When I would go into Ruth's to play the song at my lesson, I could play it perfectly. It wasn't until a little later that she realized I couldn't read the music. So she suggested I wait until I was about 12 years old to try again. (That worked - I began studying piano in St. Louis at that age. More on that later.)

AMVET Auxillary Visits Marion Veteran's Hospital

The AMVET Auxillary members visited the Marion Veteran's Hospital last evening where they entertained approximately 162 patients with the annual Christmas party.

Entertainment was as follows:
Donna Lee Caldwell and her mother, Delilah Caldwell, "Candy Store Blues", Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer", "You Told a Lie" and "Santa Claus Is Coming to Town."

Hughes twins, two tap dance numbers.

Miss Gloria Jean Johnson, tap dance.

Eddie James' Orchestra, "Lady Be Good."

Howard Goin, "Lucky Old Sun", "White Christmas", "Night and Day".

Sue Ann Hart, "Talk of the Town", and "Ain't She Sweet".

Eva York, "House of Blue Lights", "That's Good Enough for Me", and two drum solos.

Eddie James and Lee Pines, piano duet.

Sadie B. Wilson "Stormy Weather", "St. Louis Blues" and "Quanto La Gusta".

The numbers were accompanied by Lee Pines, pianist and the Eddie James orchestra Frank Atlas acted as master of ceremonies.

The veterans were given cigarettes and gifts.

Attending from Mt. Vernon were, Mrs. Howard Clifton, Mrs. Roy Sheppard, Mrs. Ruth Risley, Mr. and Mrs. Bill Hanna, Mr. and Mrs. Phil Baize, Mr. and Mrs. Bob Melcher, Mrs. Lester Shell, Mrs. Etta Belle Chapman, Mrs. Kirby Milt, Wayne Highsmith, Mrs. Elvin Burton, Mrs. Leota Burton, Miss Minnie Burton, Mrs. Eldon Hauk, Mrs. Frank Atlas and Mrs. Lee Pines.

"Mt. Vernon Register News" - Dec. 2, 1949

Carlyle American Legion Auxiliary Installation

An outstanding event of the year for the Auxiliary of the Ruf-Marcham American Legion Post was the installation Monday evening of the officers for the ensuing year, in the Lion's Hall on the second floor of the First National Bank Building, an ideal place for a gathering of this kind. Over one-hundred were in attendance which included the members, guests and visitors from Centralia, Alma, Salem, Centralia, Breese, Sandoval, Greenville and other places.

The installing officer was Mrs. Jennie Johnpeter, of Posey, at present Chapeau of the Marion-Clinton Salon 8 and 40; also past district Director of the 23rd. District, also Past President of the local Auxiliary.

The installing Sergeant-at-Arms was Mrs. Marie Panzau, of Centralia, and both did splendid work in the very impressive ceremonies. First came the usual preliminary routine for the opening of the meeting, then the installation.

The new officers are Mrs. Jo Rausch, president, for her third term; Mrs. Alice Kagy, 1st. Vice-President; Mrs. Marie Head, 2nd Vice-President; Mrs. Ida Kahlert, Secretary, which she has held for many years; Mrs. Lulu Marcham, Treasurer; Mrs. Ruth Nothaus, Chaplain; Mrs. Myrtle Frey, Sergeant-at-Arms; Mary Meyer and Mary Pulold, Assistants.

Mrs. Rausch following the ceremonies expressed her appreciation of the honor again conferred on her. Gifts from the Auxiliary were presented to the installing officers, also to the new officers.

The musical program was enjoyed very much. There were vocal duets by Mary Frerker and Cynthia Westermann, with Mrs. James Shannon, accompanist; Mrs. Margaret Wessel and Mrs. Herman Hartmann, the later also accompanist on the piano; Donna Caldwell, a child radio star from Alma, gave four vocal numbers. The big hit of the evening was the reading by Mrs. Louise Menkhous attired as a teen-ager.

Following the program all enjoyed refreshments.

SENTINEL SA

Gregory Dall, News

103 N. Walnut St.

Office Hours 10:30 - 11:30

MUSICAL PROGRAM, KIDDY PARADE IS FEATURE AT REUNION

SALEM — Yesterday afternoon at the 67th annual Soldier's and Sailor's reunion, which was VFW and Amvet day was a afternoon of a few short speeches and plenty of entertainment.

Due to circumstances beyond their control, Manuel Battles and his Melody Men were late, but the crowd did not seem to mind as Donna Caldwell entertained the crowd with a few selections.

Miss Caldwell, who was accompanied by her mother at the piano, sang "If I Knew You Were A Coming" and "Candy Store Blues".

Following Miss Caldwell, were the free acts furnished by Barnes and Carruthers, who were succeeded by Manuel Battles and his Melody Men.

Distinguished guests of the VFW and Amvets present were Louis Brake, Mt. Vernon, past dept. commander of the VFW; Cliff Raemer, Amvet Commander; Dr. H. D. Nesmith, national surgeon general of the Amvets.

Judith Lape, Rockford, president of the Amvet auxiliary; Mrs. Flora Jane McMackin, Salem, first vice president of the state; Mrs. H. E. Vogt Sr.; VFW Post 1233 auxiliary president; and Mrs. Louis Brake, 10th district past president and present chaplain of the VFW auxiliary.

"The Breese Journal" — Sept. 7, 1950

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" — July 29, 1950

Midwest Employees Have Buffet Dinner And Christmas Party

The annual Midwest Dairy Products Christmas party was held at the Hayes Hotel Saturday evening with employees and immediate members of the families attending. Dinner was served buffet style, and the menu included turkey with all the trimmings.

The children were presented with individual gifts and other prizes were received by C. R. Baker, Mrs. Wesley Brooks, Mrs. D. Stine, Mrs. Ray Klingenberg, Mrs. Jesse Cook, and Mrs. H. Hemmingshaus.

Entertainment was provided by committee chairman, Adolph Lenzini, assisted by Miss Pauline Shaw, Gus Roecheman, and H. Buehne. Miss Donna Caldwell sang and was accompanied by her mother at the piano. Other entertainment was derived from local talent.

During the remainder of the evening dancing was enjoyed and refreshments were served.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – Dec. 18, 1951

DEMOCRAT DAY—WEDNESDAY SOLDIERS-SAILORS REUNION

11 a.m. Reception at Democrat tent, Reunion Grounds. State, district and county candidates present.

12 noon—Annual Basket Dinner, Reunion grounds, in charge of the Democrat precinct committeewomen headed by Mrs. Mary Ann Sligar, county chairwoman.

1:30—Salem Summer Band concert.

Invocation by Oscar Hawkins.

National Anthem, sung by Miss Shirley Ross of Salem. Earl Merritt, assisted by County Chairman Homer Lewellen, introduce state candidates for short talks. Speakers will be Lt. Gov. Sherwood Dixon, Secretary of State Edward J. Barrett, State Auditor B. O. Cooper, Attorney General Ivan A. Elliott and Fred Cain, candidate for treasurer.

Vocal solos by Miss Donna Caldwell of Alma.

Introduction by Merritt of all district and county candidates.

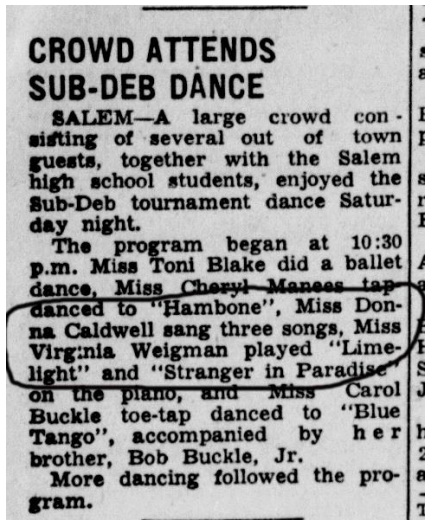
Introduction by Mrs. Sligar of Mrs. Blanche Fritz, Springfield, Democratic state chairwoman, for a short talk.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – July 29, 1952

Mr. Williams was the only person who could have vouched for me, bless his heart because he has died by now, but I sang with Louie Armstrong and his band at Sigel, Illinois. I don't have any pictures, and back then we didn't have tapes, but I wasn't very old, probably 13 years old. I actually still have the music with his name signed across the top.



"The Decatur Herald Review" – July 4, 1952



"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – Feb. 1, 1954

There was a country & western band, "Billy Joe Starr and his Home Platers", that we sang with a lot of the time. Mom and I played with them, and they played with us for many years. When we had our radio show on WCNT in Centralia, they would come on after us for a long time. Many times they would play with us, and wouldn't necessarily be mentioned – they would just sit in with us. During summertime, we'd sing with them at picnics, or special events, in which someone needed some music for entertainment. One year we did a show with them at the Marion County Fair.

Brokerage Christmas Checks Total \$185,000

The tenth annual Christmas Party of all employes of Greenberg Mercantile Corporation and Store Management, Inc., was held on December 11, in the Gold Room banquet hall of the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis, Mo. The party convened at 10:00 a.m. and adjourned for a full course noon-day chicken dinner. The session was resumed at 1:30 p.m.

Christmas checks to all the employes, totalling \$185,000 were presented by John Greenberg, president of the company.

(Continued on page 13)

Illinois Brokerage Checks Total \$185,000 (Continued From Page 2)

This company now operates thirty-four junior department stores in Illinois, Missouri, Indiana and Kentucky; in Mt. Vernon the store operates under the trade name of Brokerage on the square, managed by Kermit Willmore, and the Illinois Brokerage, managed by Wayne Frasier.

In addition to the large amount given as Christmas gifts, every employee received a collection of gifts consisting of serving tray tables, canister sets, outdoor barbecue grills, electric broilers and TV snack sets. A number of employes received special gifts for outstanding performances during the year, defense bonds and silver service items.

The total number at the party was in excess of 700, including employes of both companies, representatives of newspapers and radio stations, and special guests.

The assemblage was welcomed by Lt. Governor James T. Blair, Jr., of Missouri, who delivered a few remarks complimenting the company upon its unusual employe relationship.

A number of employes received service pins for 25 years of service with the company; others for 5, 15, and 20 years of service.

The afternoon session was a surprise presentation in honor of John Greenberg, president of the company, in which his life was depicted from the time of his birth up to the present time. Carl M. Dubinsky, personnel and public relations director for the company, acted as narrator and covered certain high lights in the life of John Greenberg, such as his birth of poor parents; his school days in the ghetto of St. Louis; his early business career; his taking charge of the company after the death of his father, Nathan Greenberg; his program, inaugurated in 1945, of giving large Christmas gifts to his employes; the fact that during the ten years since 1945, he has given to his employes an amount in excess of \$2,000,000 in Christmas gifts and special bonuses. The program also depicted his marriage; the birth of his four children; the fact that his two eldest children, Larry and Robert, are actively engaged in the company with him; also his annual program in each community in which the company operates of "There shall be no forgotten Mothers and no forgotten Fathers on their respective days of the year"; and also depicted his program of each year sending a large group of employes to Miami Beach, Florida, for a fully-paid vacation, in addition to the regular vacation allotted to them annually.

A number of very close friends of John Greenberg were members of the cast of this program, such as I. Newton Miller of Christopher, Ill., his first landlord, Joanna Chaney of Christopher, Ill., the first employe of the company and still in the employ of the company and a group of managers who have been with the company for a great number of years. An unusual surprise to Mr. Greenberg was the appearance of Murray Zacharia and his wife of New York City, who flew in especially for this occasion to be members of the cast.

As a special surprise to John Greenberg, there was presented to his wife, an oil painting of John Greenberg and to John Greenberg, an oil painting of his mother, Mrs. Nathan Greenberg, who is still living and who has never missed a party for the employes. He was especially pleased with a gift purchased by all the managers and the executives in St. Louis consisting of a complete office of new, modern furniture as a token of their appreciation to him and the high regard in which he is held by his employes.

A musical program, conducted by one of St. Louis' outstanding orchestra leaders, Al Tucker, was heard during the luncheon period. Songs were sung by Miss Donna Caldwell, a young lady who has performed notably as a singer for this company for the past eight years.

Addresses were made during the two sessions by Max Salniker, general manager of the company, Lester Brandt and John Shimkus representing the supervisors. A pledge was made by John Greenberg to his employes the same as he has in the past ten years.

Carl M. Dubinsky acted as chairman of the business sessions in the morning and afternoon.

Mt. Vernon employes attending, all of whom received Christmas gift checks, were:

9th St. Store Employes: Kermit Willmore, Erma Standridge, Lily Parsons, Ruby Isaac, Ruth Hoell, Gleason Bean, Geraldine Renn, Chas. Tryban, Vivienne Harshbarger, Juanita Smith, Sybil McCutcheon, Dorothy Faulkner, Roberta Bodine, Jack Martin and Dorothy Foster.

10th St. Store Employes: Wayne Frasier, Madge Karnoski, Opal Rector, Doris Casey, Imogene Bundy, Sue Nordin, Salesta Hughey, Idalene Witters, Dorothy Hodge andq Mae Brown.

"Mt. Vernon Register-News - Dec. 14, 1955

GIVE PROGRAM FOR RED CROSS BENEFIT TALENT SHOW HERE

The program for the Red Cross benefit variety show here Friday was announced today by Charles DiFalco, co-director. DiFalco said 20 local acts are scheduled and have been under rehearsal this past week.

The show, titled "Curt Rays' Matinee from Centralia" is set for 8 p.m. tomorrow night at the high school auditorium. Ray, CBS emcee and funnyman, is bringing a troupe from St. Louis including vocalists Dottie Bennett and Jack Hill and a radio station musicians to do the second half of the show.

Here is the first half program featuring local talent.

"Can Can," dance chorus; Kay Doan, vocalist singing "Dungaree Doll," "Soft Shoe Dance"; "Small Ballarinas," dance chorus; vocal selection by the Gospelaire Quartet; "Tap Boogie," dance number; Nancy Creed, vocalist singing "You'll Never Walk Alone"; vocal selections by the Barbershop Four; "Steam Heat," dance number; vocal selection by the Three Dukes who will introduce a new song by DiFalco, "Set Me Free"; "Little Indian Tap" dance number; vocal number by Donna Caldwell and Robin Hood; vocalist Harold Bibb, "Sincerely"; "See You Later, Alligator," tap dance; vocalist Thelma Pick singing, "Hey There"; "Toe Boogie," dance number; "Bumble Boogie" and "Autumn Leaves," featuring Donna Kratzner at the piano; "Charleston," dance routine; "Waltz Clog," dance number; vocal selections by the Ambassadors Quartet.

The first portion of the program will be closed by a dance number featuring the Arthur Murray of dancers from St. Louis in Latin American dances.

"Curt Ray takes over then," DiFalco said. "And the big question still is, 'Will they let Curt Ray sing?'"

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – Apr. 5, 1956

Vera Wicks Is Head Of Desk, Derrick

Vera Wicks of Collins Brothers Oil Company was installed as the 1958 president of the Desk and Derrick Club of Little Egypt in an impressive candlelight installation service held at the Green Hills Country Club in Mt. Vernon last Thursday evening in conjunction with the annual Desk and Derrick Club Industry Appreciation Dinner. Lucille Barthlow, the Region II Director of the Club, came here from Alma, Michigan, to conduct the installation ceremonies.

Other officers installed were Leona Koeling (L. H. Jonas of Centralia) First Vice President, Roberta Keef (E. A. Obering) Second Vice President, Marvene Guymon (Strickland Oil Co.) Recording Secretary, Carolann Bruzan (Magnolia Petroleum Co.) Corresponding Secretary and Wilma Cotton (National Associated Petroleum Co.) Treasurer. Paula Mace (Craig & Craig), Pauline Phillips (Gentiles Drilling Co.), Pauline McKay (Craig & Craig), Maggie Jessup (W. C. McBride, Inc. of Centralia), and Ruth Etheridge (Illinois Lease Operating, Inc.) were installed as Board Members.

Paula Mace, the retiring president, gave the President's Report, reviewing briefly the programs, speakers and field trips enjoyed during the year by the group. She expressed her appreciation to all in the industry along with members of the Club and her boss, Mr. Campbell of Craig & Craig, for the cooperation and help given in her tenure of office.

Mardi Gras "Oil Story Parade" was the theme carried out by the Decorating Committee, whose general chairman was Leona Koeling. Clusters of gaily colored balloons and serpentine were suspended from the ceiling of the spacious dining-room lending a festive air to the occasion. The centerpieces were miniature floats depicting the oil story from the "Oil Lease" to the "Million Dollar Baby." Members of the Club who created the individual floats were: "Oil Lease" by Carolann Bruzan, "Supply House" by Elaine Bonnell, "Drilling Rig" by Georgia Lynn, "Dry Hole" by Bobbie Keef, "Gusher" by Margaret York, "Tanks and Pipe Line" by Marvene Guymon, "Refinery" by Lizette McCard, "Filling Station" by Lucille Gravitt, "Freight Truck Line" by Flora Hawa, "Farm" by Louise Beckman, "Air Port" by Helen Ferguson, "The Jackpot" by Pauline Phillips. The speaker's table display was designed and made by Lizette McCard. Pink candles, carnations and ribbon along with sprinklings of confetti completed

the decorations. Ball-point pens were given as favors.

Eddie Mifflin, playing his distinctive style on the organ, entertained the guests during the dinner hour.

A humorous skit entitled "D & D Oil Company" (With a feminine touch) was presented by the following members. Ella Burton (Liberty Petroleum), Pauline McKay, Bobbie Keef, Pauline Phillips and Margaret York (Erie Pipe Line Co.)

Donna Caldwell and Larry Bryan of Centralia entertained with a song and comedy routine.

Following the program Vera Wicks, the mistress of ceremonies, introduced the guest speaker for the evening, Mr. James M. Patterson, who is Director of Field Service of the Public Relations Department of Standard Oil Company of Indiana in Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Patterson was a very able and dynamic speaker.

Preceding the dinner a social hour, presented through the courtesy of the First National Bank and the Security Bank, both of Mt. Vernon, was enjoyed by the members and their guests.

"Mt. Vernon Register-News" – Jan. 27, 1958



Sentinel Staff Photo

A BRIGHT SPOT IN THE NIGHT — The Pittenger Bandshell in Library Park lighted up last night for the first community band concert of the season, promises to be a bright spot for entertainment and community sociability throughout the summer. Regular features will be the band concerts on Thursday nights, and shows sponsored by the Centralia Recreation Department on Friday nights. Union church services will be held there on Sunday nights beginning in July.

'Meet Me in Dreamland' Tonight's Bandshell Theme

Centralia (Ill.) Sentinel
Friday, June 20, 1958

A delightful children's story in which the toys in a child's nursery all come to life, will be enacted in a musical program to be given tonight at 8 o'clock in the Pittenger Bandshell under the sponsorship of the Centralia Recreation Department.

Mrs. Dale Reynolds is director and the characters in the musical "Meet Me Tonight in Dreamland" are as follows:

Mother, Sharon Maddox; father, Jerry Sanders; child, Connie Reynolds; fairy, Marlene Watson; ballerina doll, Jana Bourland; toy trumpeter, Kirby Mooney; Goldilocks, Donna Caldwell, three bears, Lillian Vogel, Sandy Kirkland, Patricia Norman; Raggedy Anna, Jo Reynolds; Raggedy Andy, Julia Arning; Jack in the Box, Nancy Roeckeman; mammy doll, Patty Miller; Cinderella, Bonnie Dahl; "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers", Carol Johnson, Kim Street, Terry Davis, Gail Mansfield, Lynn Mansfield, Linda Spears; Robin Hood, Mark Vogel; rocky horse, Jane Hodson, Janice Bonner; "Wedding of the Painted Dolls", Theresa Vaccaro, Linda Mansfield, Mike Bond, Carol Phelps and June Davies.

The next program will be "Swing Your Partner", a country style show. It will be held June 27 at 8 o'clock.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" — June 20, 1958

"Wonderful Memories" by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
— as told to Dolores Ford Mobley" (October 2020)

'Swing Your Partner' Show In Band Shell At 8 Tonight

A lively show titled "Swing Your Partner" is planned at the Pittenger Band Shell in Library Park tonight by the Centralia Recreation Department.

Dancers from the Circle Eight Square Dance Club will be on hand to stage some square dancing and circle folk dance exhibitions.

Sixteen youngsters from the playgrounds will put on some dances and there will be vocal music.

Miss Donna Caldwell will be featured in some hillbilly type songs, and there will be songs by Miss Nancy Stevenson, Miss Donna Lloyd and a girl's trio.

Centralia's popular master of ceremonies, Walter Shipp, will be on hand to keep things rolling at a lively pace.

The show opens at 8 o'clock and is free to the public.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – June 27, 1958

Rehearsals Go Into Final Stages For 'Holidaze'

Rehearsals for the revue "Holidaze" which is being presented Monday and Tuesday, Nov. 3 and 4 at the Centralia Township High School under the sponsorship of the Centralia Business and Professional Women's Club, have gone into their final stages. Many local people with talents will be appearing on the show.

Mrs. William McKain and Mrs. Robert Laswell will display both dramatic and vocal talents. From a dramatic standpoint they will appear in "Holidaze in Grand Central Station, New York" as two old lady travelers. Granville Rigg will play the role of train announcer. Later in the program they will appear in comedy vocal numbers.

Costumes imported from China will be worn by Fred Van Tassel and Linda Coffman when they impersonate a mandarin and singing girl in "Holidaze in Formosa".

Miss Donna Caldwell who was a hit in the B. and P. W. Club show two years ago, will appear several times. She will be soloist in "Holidaze in New Orleans" and will be supported by six tap dancers: Jana Borland, Judy Elliston, Michele George, Sharon Collings, Julia Manns and Tanga Richards.

Miss Sharon Maddox and John Jenkins will sing in "Holidaze in Paris". Mrs. Mable Phillips will sing the lead in "Holidaze in Dresden". Three toe dancers, Sharon Koelling, Jana Borland and Jana Hester will impersonate Dresden music boxes that come to life.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel" – Oct. 29, 1958

Meet Me in St. Louis (the city, not the show, that is)

St. Louis Post Dispatch – Mar 11, 1951

STEINWAY
THE INSTRUMENT OF THE IMMORTALS

Rich in romance and tradition...
the Steinway is the favorite of
virtually every great artist of our
time and the cherished possession
in homes throughout the world.

“POP” CONCERT
by the **SAINT LOUIS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**
Opera House, Kiel Auditorium
Tuesday Evening, March 13th, at 8:30 P. M.
MAX STEINDEL, Conductor

Soloist
SETH GREINER
Pianist

Nationally known pianist who will play a most interesting program accompanied by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra.



SETH GREINER

This “Pop” Concert by the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Max Steindel, will be one of the musical high lights of the season. Tickets on sale now at the

Aeolian Box Office

AEOLIAN
COMPANY OF MISSOURI
W. F. CHRISLER • PRESIDENT
1004 OLIVE STREET • SAINT LOUIS (1)

I was playing piano by ear before age 12, but Bonnie Ross encouraged me to take piano lessons. It was Bonnie Ross who started using me as a vocalist with the Bonnie Ross’ Orchestra after I won that “Stars of Tomorrow” contest. Occasionally he would call on me to work with him St. Louis for an event, but not too often before I was 17. I have a picture of Bonnie and me singing at the Starlight Room at the Chase Hotel.

So when I was 12 years old, Bonnie helped me get started learning under Seth Greiner. Seth Greiner played for the Muni Opera and he also played for the St. Louis Symphony, as well as being a soloist too. He taught me to accompany myself with the piano, and to learn different skills that I couldn’t necessarily find around home, so that’s why I started studying in St. Louis with him.

Seth knew that I wanted to sing with a bands, so he said, “Let’s see how you do on a couple of the standard songs that bands use quite a bit with singers.” So I sang them for him, and he told me, “Donna, we’ve got to get you to Benny Raider so that he can hear this.” Benny was an agent and had bands that he played with around St. Louis. Seth said, “Why don’t I set you up with an audition. I’ll see if Benny Raider will put you on a job where I’m accompanying and we’ll work on a couple of

numbers together beforehand.” So, I went to sing that night at a dinner-dance, and Benny liked me, so he kept me from then on, and would send me out with the band on different jobs. There would be jobs working about anytime, because there were so many events at all different. They might have a jazz combo playing background music at a woman’s auxiliary one day, or it might be a dinner-dance in the evening. I never knew what I’d be singing at in the afternoon, but if it was evening, it was usually a dinner-dance and I was told what it would be.

It was after Seth Greiner helped me get set up with Benny Raider that I freelanced as a vocalist from the time I was 17 years old on. Every time they needed a vocalist I’d go running over to St. Louis. I’d sing dance band songs – all of the oldies and some of the new ones. When I was younger, my folks drove me over to St. Louis every Saturday – for Saturday nights. Once in awhile it would be a Friday and Saturday. It was while I was in Jr. College that I really started singing over in St. Louis though. I think I did every club, every hotel, every place with entertainment in St. Louis - and it all started with Bonnie Ross. Bonnie also had his radio show with Russ David in St. Louis at the time too. I worked singing jobs with Russ David at the

Chase Hotel in the Club. Russ had also taken over the band schedule of Benny Raider after Benny passed away.



The Chase Park Plaza in St. Louis (Photo by Dwayne Pounds)

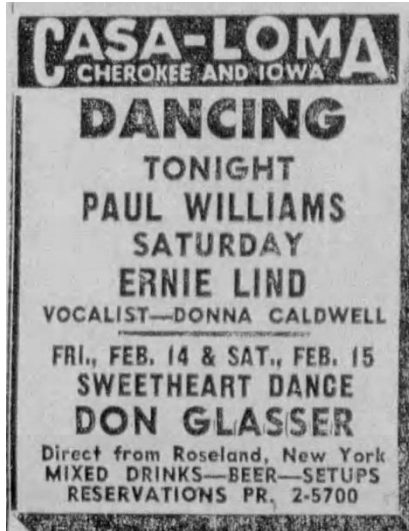
As far as St. Louis goes though, the Chase Hotel was “THE biggie”. The biggest stars would all perform and stay there, and I ran across so many stars in St. Louis while I performed at the Chase Hotel. They had the Starlight Room, and the Zodiac Lounge, and the Chase Ballroom, to name just a few where music and entertainment would be happening - and I’ve worked every one of those rooms with different bands. In the Chase Hotel, you’d walk in the front door, and you’d go one way and there was the bar, and they also broadcast from there. And there was a coffee shop a little further up. And then go upstairs and there was a huge floor which was called the “Chase Club”, and the “Starlight Roof” would be another great big room to sing in. The Corzanne Room was smaller and just for entertainment.

While I was in Carbondale going to school, I came home every weekend for the Centralia radio show. I’d buy a \$1.97 ticket on the train from Carbondale to Centralia, and my folks would drive down to Centralia to pick me up. I’d also have vocalist jobs over in St. Louis on a lot of weekends – occasionally on a Friday night, but usually on Saturdays. Either my parents or Bob (if he wasn’t working that weekend) would pick me up or take me over. I could never thank them all for what they did for me. My parents would often go out to eat in St. Louis while I was singing, and then sit in the car and wait for me for part of the time until I was done with my show. It’s a different time now though – that would make me so nervous to do that in the city with all of the crime. While I was performing and during breaks and between sets, I would walk around, no telling where, and by myself, but I wouldn’t do that in today’s world.

I worked with several orchestras and bands in St. Louis. I started out with Benny Raider, and Russ David after that. Then I jumped off onto Ralph Abatiello (I worked a lot of big Shriner events with Ralph and his orchestra), and got to work with Ernie Lind, Wally Masters, Charlie Novak, and sometimes several at the same time – all around St. Louis.

Besides the Chase, I used to sing at the Casa-Loma Ballroom in St. Louis a lot. It was the only one at that point still open for dancing, and it was a big ballroom. When I sang with the orchestra it was dinner-dance, and people would get up and dance just like you would see in the movies.

While singing at events or with a band, I'd go around to different tables and I might sing to a particular man who was going to retire that wanted special attention, or someone being honored, etc. Of course, every once in a while at a show, there would be a character that would say something inappropriate, and I'd have to make a joke out of it.



“St. Louis Post Dispatch” – Feb. 7, 1969



“St. Louis Post Dispatch” – Nov. 22, 1972

I also sang often at the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis, and of course I did the Admiral Riverboat too once in awhile.



With the Ralph Abatiello Orchestra at the Jefferson Hotel in St. Louis

And all thru the years, whether I was just a little girl singing at the Soldiers & Sailors Reunion in Salem, or an elegant dinner-dance in St. Louis, Mom would sew those costumes. Something you'd wear to a dance, but then she'd make them so I could wear many of them around here as well. There were some outfits that you could change around and add or take off pieces to make different too. It didn't have a lot of different outfits because I didn't go to the same place all the time, and the guys were in their tux every night.

From the Soldiers & Sailors Reunion in Salem to Nashville, Tennessee

My start in Nashville all began because of performance one night at the Soldiers & Sailors Reunion in Salem. It was probably around my senior year in high school in about 1958, and Robin Hood and I were singing together. When we performed, I would sing, and he would play the guitar or drums and also sing, while mom played piano. On this particular night at the Reunion, a man by the name of Billy Senior said he wanted to talk to me after our show. He was a manager for several of Nashville's entertainers, and was there that particular evening because a client of his was performing there also. After our show, he introduced himself, and he asked, "Would you like to go to Nashville?" And I said, "Well yes, I would." He asked me, "Can you make it to Nashville in a couple of weeks?", and I replied, "I can let you know tomorrow."

One of the acts that Billy managed was "Lonzo and Oscar", who were two silly comedians, and they also sang country & western. (They were later inducted into the Country Music Association Hall of Fame in Nashville.) He thought I would fit in with them just great, because during my shows, I also included a comedy skit where I had a Daisy Mae outfit with guns, my hair in pigtails, and wore a funny hat – almost like a Minnie Pearl type comedy. I asked him, "What do I have to do?" And he told me, "I'm going to book you on one of their shows, and they can see you act." That's how many decided if they wanted hire you – there wasn't a formal audition, instead they would book you on their show, and see how you performed and how the audience responded to you. That way they could also cover for you during their act if it turned out that the person wasn't good. So that's what they did for me, and they decided they liked how I fit into their act, so they would use me at their shows at county fairs whenever they were within easy driving distance around Illinois and even some Missouri or Kentucky.



Donna in her costume for her character

Now when I first went down to Nashville, to be on the "Lonzo and Oscar Show" that first time, I also had an interview with Ott Devine, manager of Grand Ole Opry. I had my performance with "Lonzo and Oscar" all done, and I knew they were going to use me, but I wanted to get on the Opry too - but to do that, I had to get permission from Mr. Devine. Well, Ott Devine heard me, but he guessed it right off, and said, "You're not a country singer, are

you?” And I said “No, but I do a lot of different kind of numbers.” He laughed and said, “You could get by, but you’re more of a jazz vocalist, aren’t you?” And I said, “Yes – I sing a lot of modern tunes, and I work in St. Louis, but I’d like to work here too.” Nashville was beginning to add more variety to the type of country music and was moving away from just being the real twangy music. He said, “We just don’t have a set for you – you’ll have to come in on one of the sets with somebody else, but we just don’t have a special section that you fit into.” So I couldn’t get my own 15 minutes slot - I would have to get in with somebody else to get in. That would have been just fine with me – whatever way that I could get on the Opry!

Chet Atkins, who was there to play guitar at the Opry that night, was standing with Mr. Devine when he called me over to talk, and Chet said, “If you don’t have anything for her tonight, why don’t you put her on the “Ernest Tubbs Show”?” And Mr. Devine said “Yeah - that would be fine. That would be a good one for her.” The “Ernest Tubbs Show” was broadcast right after the Opry. It was kind of like the Grand Ole Opry show all over again, and Ernest Tubbs was the emcee. People came in at all hours to the Ernest Tubbs Record Shop - this was a real record and music shop - but it also had a stage. Performers would do their act there on the stage and it would also be broadcasted. Different stars would come in and perform on his show all night, while there were also all sorts of people standing around shopping and watching the show. It was similar to the bars in Nashville, where people are eating and talking, but instead they were shopping and talking, while there were performers on stage too. Of course, a lot of the performers had their records out too. So, I played there on stage that night. Through the years, anytime I was in Nashville, I could sing at his place.

As for the “Lonzo and Oscar” Show, I continued to perform with them for years. Not only did they use me in their act at county fairs whenever they were within easy driving distance around Illinois and even some Missouri or Kentucky, they also included me in their act during their 15 minute sets down at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. I was on the stage at the Opry with them for several years when they had shows there.

So in the end of the 1950s and into the 1960’s I would be performing in both Nashville and St. Louis, but it really got busy in St. Louis in the 1960’s. Nashville was just a fun place to go now and again to perform, but it was nice being there too. I’d be there the most during fair season, but St. Louis was mainly where it was hot and heavy.

To Sing At Home Show



Jaycee Home Show Chairman J. R. Lamberson, announced that the entertainment for this year's Home Show will be Miss Donna Caldwell, above. Miss Caldwell, backed by a combo, will perform 15 minutes of every hour during the three nights of the Home Show on October 27, 28 and 29.

Donna's musical career began at the age of 2 when she was singing publicly. At 8 years of age she had her own radio show on WCNT in Centralia. Since then she has appeared on radio and television shows on most of the St. Louis and Chicago stations, and has also appeared on station WMIX in Mt. Vernon. Among the shows on which she has appeared is Russ David's radio and TV show. During the summer Miss Caldwell works with the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville, Tennessee, along with such stars as Minnie Pearl, Lonzo and Oscar, Hank Snow, Ernest Tubb, Brenda Lee, Roy Acuff and others. For the past two years she has been singing for the Benny Rader Music Agency in St. Louis. Miss Caldwell, now 21 years of age, is a music major at Southern Illinois University.

\$200 prize will be awarded on Saturday night, October 29.

Chairman Lamberson, said that this year's Home Show will offer the spectator more than any that have been held in the past.

It was also announced that als

"Mt. Vernon Register-News" – Oct. 6, 1960

The Radio Shows with my Mom, and performing in Mt. Vernon & Centralia

RADIO STATION WCNT PROGRAM		
1210 On Your Dial		Centralia, Ill.
Weekdays	4:03 Favorite Five	8:00 News
6:00 Sign-On	4:45 News	8:05 Gospelaires
6:25 Myzon Report	5:00 Music	8:30 Gospel Music
6:30 News	6:00 Trans. Variety	9:00 Fellowship Program
6:45 Morn. Worship	6:15 News	9:15 How Christian Science Heals
7:00 News	6:30 Sundown Ser.	9:30 Highways to Safety
7:15 Weath. Show	7:00 News	9:45 Sacred Heart Program
7:30 Sports	7:05 Meet the Artist	10:00 News, Sports
8:00 World News		10:15 Guest Star
8:10 State and Area News	Saturdays	10:30 Min. Alliance Church
8:15 Hon. Roll Hits	10:00 News	11:30 Proudly we Hail
9:00 News	10:05 Church Bull.	
10:00 News	10:15 Here's to Vets	
10:05 Woman's World	10:30 What's New	
10:06 Bull. Board	11:00 Woman's Mag. News	
10:30 Mary Blaine	11:15 Donna and Delilah Show	
11:00 Woman's Mag. News	11:30 Billy Joe Starr	
11:05 Smart Shop	11:55 Myzon Report	
		P. M.
		12:00 News, Sports
		12:15 Open

"The Breese Journal" – July 10, 1958

Mom and I did our radio show for a total of 33 years. We began at the radio station WCNT in Centralia and performed our show there for 13 years, but then they wanted to turn the Centralia radio station into a rock station.

So, the following Saturday I saw Brian Davidson and he put us on the WJBD radio station in Salem. I was just out of college or so when we started there in Salem, and we continued there for 20 years. We would sing songs, entertain, take requests, and often end our show with a church hymn. We were often told that the residents in our area nursing homes looked so forward to our show when we were on WJBD. We would mention their name, or sing a special song or hymn that they liked. Just little things like that, but it meant so much to them. I felt so sorry for them when our show was cancelled on WJBD - they looked so forward to it.

People still wonder why we stopped performing our "Donna & DeLilah Show" on the Salem radio station, but it wasn't our choice. WJBD was being changed over to a rock station and there was no room for a show like ours anymore. So one day, Brian Davidson sent someone in to tell us that they no longer needed us. He didn't even have the nerve to tell us himself. It just about broke my mom's heart.

STREET FAIR

Veterans of Foreign Wars, Post 3523,
Carlyle, Illinois.

NORTH SIDE OF SQUARE

Carlyle, Illinois

FRIDAY, SATURDAY, and SUNDAY,

AUGUST 5-6-7

Refreshments - Carnival Rides - Concessions

FRIDAY—FISH FRY

Chicken Plate Lunch ... 85¢
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Pillowslip and Bedsheet Games

★ **BIG DANCE** ★

FRIDAY, SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

FRI. & SUN.—WCNT RADIO STAR

BILLIE JOE STARR and his Homeplaters
with **Donna Caldwell**, singer.

**Rock 'N Roll — Waltzes — Round and
Square Dancing.**

**Every Night Come And Spend The
Weekend With The Vets**

FUN FOR ALL—YOUNG AND OLD

"The Breese Journal" - Aug. 4, 1960

Variety Show To Feature Soloist

The third in a series of variety shows to be presented by the Mattoon Variety Club will be staged at 3 p.m. Sunday in the Burgess-Osborne Auditorium.

Featured soloist on the program will be Miss Donna Caldwell, a 1962 graduate of Southern Illi-



Miss Donna Caldwell

nois University. Miss Caldwell taught vocal music at the high school in Farina during the past school year. She has had her own radio show over station WCNT, Centralia, since she was eight years old.

Miss Caldwell, who also has appeared on the Grand Ole Opry, will sing three numbers during the local program, including "All of Me," "Embraceable You" and "Dark Town Strutters Ball."

Three Amateur Acts

Three amateur acts will be vying for top position in the judging. Local talent will be seen in the modern dance team of Dianne Linder and Susie Wilson. Amateur comedian Jim Ronchetti will also give a performance.

A male quartet from Oakland High School, "The Freshmen Four," will make its first appearance on the local stage.

Other groups which are scheduled to be in the program are Bartlett's combo, which was judged first in the May show, and the Jefferson Junior High School stage band. The band will be directed by Richard Foster.

Featured band during the show will be a four-piece rock'n' roll group called the Continentals, led by Gus Pedigo.

Guest singers with the regular variety show band will be Don Claybaugh, Neoga, and Karen Cooley, a student at Eastern Illinois University.

Selections to be presented by the two vocalists are "Blue Moon" and "Laura" by Claybaugh, and "Sing, Sing, Sing" and "My Ideal" by Miss Cooley.

Denny Ariens, a student at Mattoon High School, will be featured on the saxophone during the band's presentations.

"Mattoon Daily Journal-Gazette" - June 12, 1963

*"Wonderful Memories" by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
- as told to Dolores Ford Mobley" (October 2020)*

ABBATIELLO'S BAND TO PLAY AT ENDICOTT PARK

Ralph Abbatiello and his band will give a concert next Thursday from 8 to 10 p.m. at Endicott Park, Endicott avenue near St. Charles Rock road, St. John.

Selections include "Music Man," "Bugle Holiday," a John Philip Sousa March, "In the Mood" and "Red Roses for a Blue Lady." Donna Caldwell will sing and a Dixieland group will perform.

Abbatiello will play "Song of India" in a trombone solo.

The concert is presented by the Falstaff Brewing Corp. in co-operation with Local No. 2, American Federation of Musicians and the St. Louis County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Variety Show Slated Sunday

The Mattoon Variety Club will present its October show at 3 p.m. Sunday in Burgess-Osborne Auditorium.

The shows were presented in the evening this summer, but now revert to the afternoons during the winter months.

Guest star will be Donna Caldwell of Farina, who will sing. She has her own radio show in Salem and has made guest appearances in St. Louis.

Other vocalists will be Karen

Cooley, Bob Lambert, Gary and Gary from Eastern Illinois University and a quartet from Mattoon High School.

Clark Brogan will play a piano selection. Steve McClellan, a member of the Variety Club Stage Band, will play a trombone selection, accompanied by the band.

Director of the band is Charles Hayes, band director at Central Junior High School. Organist for the show is Karen Lingler.

"Journal Gazette" – Oct. 15, 1965

"St. Louis Post Dispatch" – Aug. 12, 1965

VARIETY SHOW

Sunday, May 7 at 3:00 P.M. in the —

Burgess-Osborne Auditorium

Free Admission To All — Don't Miss It

SEE GUEST STARS . . .

<p>Donna Caldwell</p> <p>Singer from Chase Hotel in St. Louis.</p>	<p>Lehner Sisters</p> <p>Acrobatic dancers recently performing in Las Vegas, Nevada.</p>	<p>Jim Huston</p> <p>Baritone singer from Milliken University, Decatur, Illinois.</p>
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Plus . . . the VARIETY CLUB BAND AND SINGERS

The music for this occasion is provided by the cooperation of the American Federation of Musicians through a grant from the Music Performance Trust Fund of the Recording Industries, and is sponsored by:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mory's Budget Jewelers ● Kent Lumber & Supply Co. ● First National Bank of Mattoon ● Spitz Clothiers ● Kirk's Appliance ● Arcade Drug Store ● Mattoon Journal-Gazette ● Howell Asphalt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Central National Bank of Mattoon ● My Store ● K. C. Summers Buick ● Phipps' Shoe Store ● Anderman's Furniture ● Young's Department Store ● Myers Brothers ● Ace Hardware ● H. E. Checkley Agency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Montgomery Ward ● Manuel Real Estate ● Mattoon Federal Savings & Loan Ass'n. ● Samuel Music Company ● The Office ● Thrifty Drug ● Fred Smith Shoes ● Wilb Walker's ● Mattoon Texaco Ser.
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"Journal Gazette" – May 6, 1967

"Wonderful Memories" by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley" (October 2020)

We used to work at the “Top of First” in Mt. Vernon seven nights a week, and Mom and I worked there for a whole year. It was in the entire top floor above the bank, and there was a restaurant and lounge up there. The manager heard our radio show, and he liked the kind of music we were singing and doing, and said he’d like to have those girls up here at “The First.”



TOP OF THE FIRST
DINING ROOM OPEN
MONDAY THROUGH SATURDAY
Luncheon—11:00 A.M.
Dinner—5:00 P.M.
BANQUET FACILITIES
ENTERTAINMENT NIGHTLY
Donna & Delilah Singing & Playing
Your Favorite Selections.
TOP OF THE FIRST
First Bank & Trust Bldg.
Mt. Vernon, Ill.

“Mt. Vernon Register News” – May 5, 1975

One night I was working at the “Top of the First” in Mt. Vernon, when a man who was at the bar, asked me if I worked anywhere else. We got to talking while I got a soda, and I told him, “Yes, I work in St. Louis once in awhile.” When he asked if I ever went to the Congress Hilton hotel in Chicago, I told him I have, but I usually stay across the street instead at the Best Western. It turned out he was also a friend of Joey Aiuppa, and also a friend of the many who owned the bar and lounge at the Congress Hilton. So anytime I went to Chicago, I could sing at the bar and lounge there. I’d sing just a couple of songs when I went there, not all night.

After working in Mt. Vernon, Mom & I performed at the “Centralia House” during weekends for a time.




THE CENTRALIA HOUSE
Presents
Donna & Delilah
Jazz vocalist Donna Caldwell
with Delilah at the keyboard.
Every Friday, Saturday & Sunday Nite
Fri. & Sat. 9:00 P.M. till ?
Sunday 8:00 P.M. till ?
111 North Oak St. 2 drink min. Ph. 532-9754

“Mt. Vernon Register News” – Oct. 21, 1977

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*

I sang the National Anthem at the St. Louis Cardinals ballpark three times in the 1960s and 1970s.

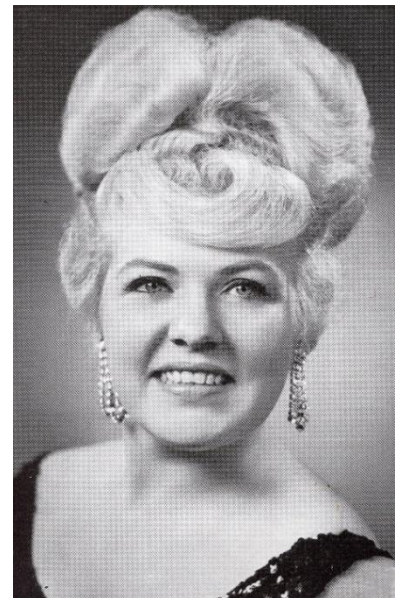


Guest Soloist

Mrs. Donna Caldwell Kerley of Alma will appear as soloist to sing the national anthem for the Cardinal baseball game at Busch Memorial Stadium on Wednesday evening, July 17, at 7:30 p.m. This will mark her third consecutive year as soloist for "St. Peter Night at the Ballgame." Mrs. Kerley is vocal music instructor at LaGrove Unit School District, Farina. During the past 15 years she has appeared as a professional vocalist in St. Louis and is currently featured with Art Wilbur, Johnny Polozin and Wall Mastens orchestras. Mrs. Kerley still maintains her radio show with her mother, Mrs. Delilah Caldwell, on WJBD.

"Centralia Sentinel" – July 17, 1974

I've been on elevators shoulder to shoulder with performers. Once I sat with Guy Lombardo at the Chase Hotel drinking coffee. I worked at the Chase an awful a lot. I performed at the Moolah Temple in St. Louis - the Shriners had me working there every New Year's Eve. I have worked with Ralph Abatiello, Benny Raider, Al Polson, and Russ David – the biggie. I don't know – almost all of them. One time I was in Chicago at the Congress Hilton performing. Who was in the lounge but a friend of Joey Aiuppoa's!



Teaching - “My Kids” at Farina & St. Peter

I started teaching in 1962, and I continued to sing while I was teaching and after I got married too. When I got to Farina I taught all of the grades and had three schools – St. Peter grade school, Farina grade school, and Farina LaGrove high school. There wasn’t much of a vocal program yet, and it could kind of be pulling teeth getting some of those farm boys to sing. It was a lot of fun though, and the program really grew. We had concerts, contests, Variety Shows and so much more. Of course, I’d have to watch myself a little when my kids from LaGrove School would come down and watch me perform while I was performing at the “Centralia House.”

I taught for just a few more years after Farina LaGrove consolidated with Kinmundy-Alma and became South Central, and when it came time to retire, it had been 33 years (when you count first job a North Wamac, where I just filled in a little bit at the end of the school year.)

I loved teaching, and I loved “my kids”.



1962-1963 LaGrove High School yearbook



1963-1964 LaGrove High School yearbook



1963-1964 LaGrove High School yearbook – School Chorus

**CLASS PLAY AT FARINA
HIGH SCHOOL TONIGHT**

Farina, Oct. 23 (Special)

The senior class of LaGrove Community High School will present two one-act plays in the school gymnasium at 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday.

The plays are "Riders to the Sea" and "The Laughing Ghost." They will be directed by Donald Blair, English-French instructor.

The school's 72-voice choir directed by Donna Caldwell will sing between presentation of the two plays each night.

"The Decatur Herald" – Oct. 24, 1963

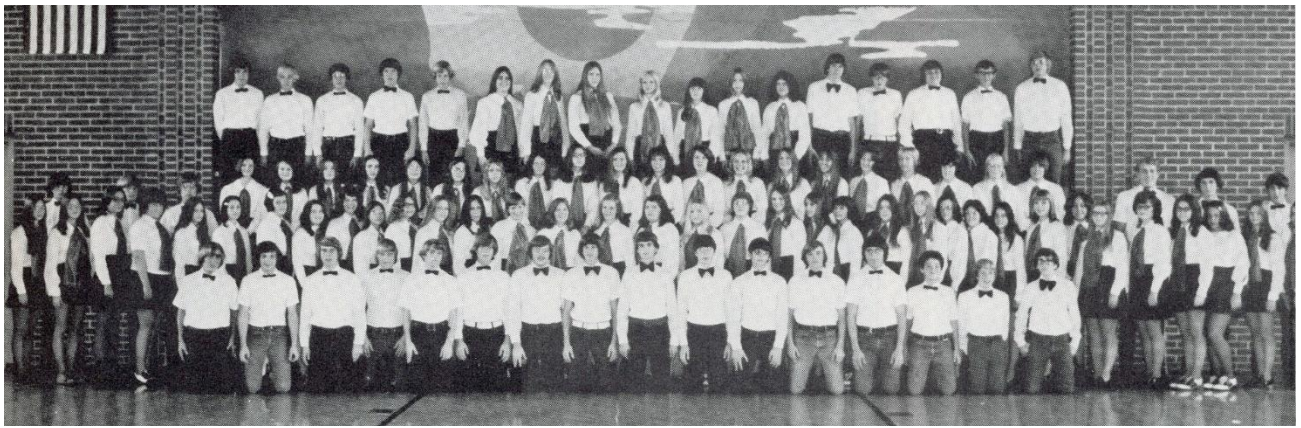


The senior class takes pride in dedicating the 1968 LaGrove yearbook to the chorus instructor whom we all know and admire, Mrs. Donna Kerley.

Students who have known her as their choir director, realize that she has given them something irreplaceable - friendship.

Dedication in the LaGrove High School yearbook – 1967-1968

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*



1973-1974 LaGrove High School yearbook – School Chorus



1971-1972 LaGrove High School Yearbook



1974-1975 LaGrove High School Yearbook



1983-1984 LaGrove High School yearbook – School Chorus

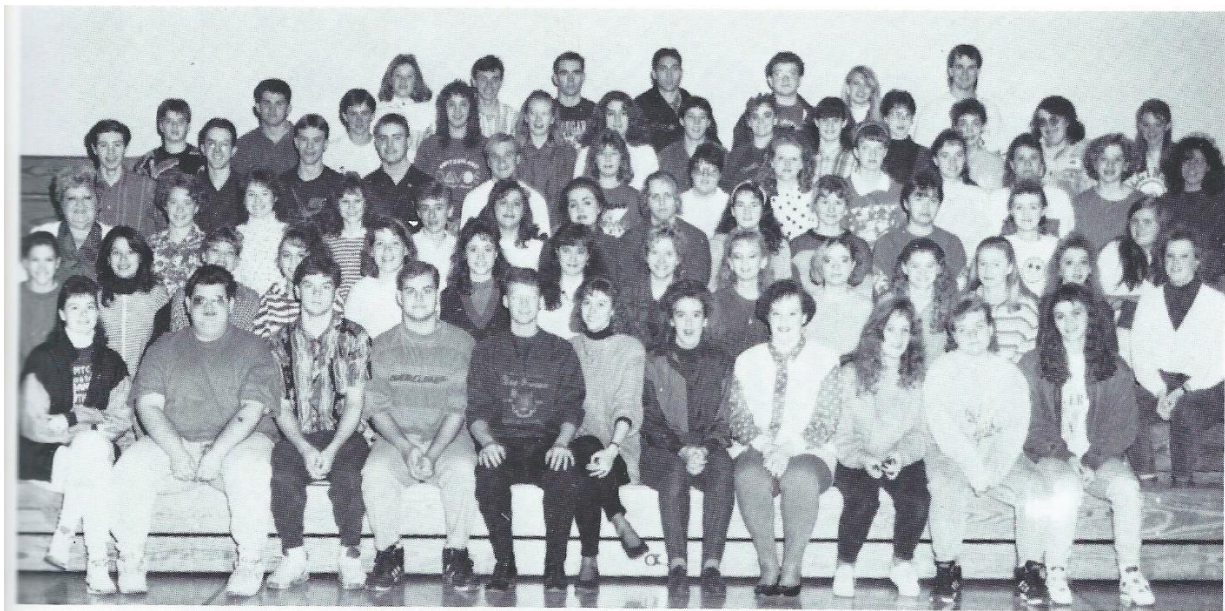
*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*



Mrs. Donna Kerley, chorus director, with the Chorus' accompanists — Sue Lotz and Stacey Courson.

*Dedication in the LaGrove High School yearbook
- 1986-87*

The 1986-87 Yearbook Staff would like to dedicate the LaFarion this year to Mrs. Donna Kerley who has served as the chorus director at LaGrove for twenty-five years. Throughout her teaching years at LHS, Mrs. Kerley has produced many entertaining events for the public, such as variety shows, Christmas concerts, and choral contests. She is highly respected by her fellow staff members and her students. We feel she has definitely been a benefit to the chorus program and has been very dedicated to her students and her work. As a small token of our appreciation we would like to dedicate the 1986-87 LHS Yearbook to Mrs. Donna Kerley.




1992-1993 South Central Community High School –Chorus

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*

On May 20, 2017, Mrs. Kerley’s “kids” put together a wonderful tribute. What a special teacher she had to have been to still be loved by so many of her students 30, 40, and 50+ years later! The highlight of the tribute was when Mrs. Kerley stood in front of this large group of former chorus students, and directed them in song, one more time.

There was a Facebook page set up for the event called “A Tribute to Donna Kerley”. (Thank you to all who shared photos and articles on that Facebook page.)

Here are just a few photos from that page:



Atribute to
DONNA KERLEY

Saturday, May 20, 2017
7:00pm
South Central
High School Gym
Farina, IL

Please feel free to shower her with cards at:
Donna Kerley Tribute
PO Box 32
Farina, IL 62838



“Donna (Caldwell) Kerley was the Music Director from 1961-1993 at Farina LaGrove, now South Central, in Farina, Illinois. She taught grade and high school music and chorus. Kerley has made impact, of some kind, on so many students through the years. All of us who she taught, have become her kids. With all the blood, sweat and tears she has given us through so many practices and performances, it’s now time for us, her kids, to give something back to her. An evening to remember has been set for Saturday, May 20, 2017, at the South Central High School in Farina, at 7:00 pm. All of her students are invited to this one-time performance reunion. Shower cards can be mailed to her at: Donna Kerley Tribute, PO Box 32, Farina IL 62838. All

cards and tribute donations will be given to her the night of the performance.”



Memories and Stories from LaGrove Staff and Students

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*



“The highlight of my evening was to being able to direct again.” —Donna Caldwell Kerley

May 20, 2017

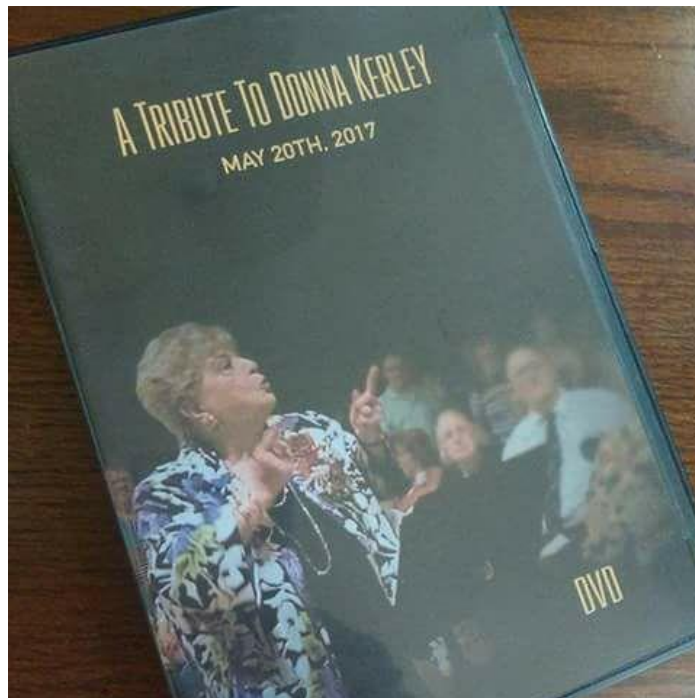


In front and center and directing and she still had the attention of each and every student.

*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*



Donna (Caldwell) Kerley with her School Chorus Kids at her Tribute in 2017



The Tribute DVD - Music, Laughter and Tears (Kleenex not included)

In 2017, after the tribute was given in her honor on that special day, Donna wrote a couple of letters to the LaGrove community which were published in the "Farina News". The first was published in the summer, and the second during December.

A BIG THANK YOU

After crying for three days up here on my cloud and not able to even speak above a whisper, I felt I should jump down and go see a doctor.

I've asked God to help me find the proper words to thank such a wonderful group of people: the community, everyone of "my kids", the faculty (grade through high), The Loading Dock, The Farina News, merchants, Mr. Page and Mr. Roberts for emceeing, all those who sent cards and gifts, and just a multitude of people who seem to have an everlasting love, generosity, respect, and friendship.

The fantastic tribute that was given to me on Saturday, May 20, was the most wonderful gift that I have ever, ever received. Since I have had the honor of singing with the Louie Armstrong Band at Sigel, Illinois, his version of "It's A Wonderful World" as an underscore for the slides brought back many wonderful memories.

You will never know how much the tribute helped me find "my own self identity" that seemed to have gotten lost over the past few years. After the thrill and honor of directing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" once again, some how I felt I had finally come home and now I feel like "me" again.

Seeing the long lines of friendly faces, 4 and 5 deep, made me feel blessed that I was present and able to talk and visit with them. Since all of my family is in heaven looking down proudly, I am sure they would want to thank everyone for their kindness.

This was quite a journey for all of us in one day.

I would like to have copies of all the photos taken of the tribute, if you don't mind sharing them.

I would like to leave you with my favorite Irish blessing: "May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face. May the rain fall soft upon your fields. Until we meet again, May God keep you in the palms of His Hands."

The next time you think of me don't forget "I love you."

Mrs. Donna Kerley

My Christmas Card To You

I finally decided this is the best way for me to wish "My Kids" and all the wonderful people in the area a "Very Merry Christmas" and a wonderful 2018.

I have already received my Christmas present that also serves for every holiday occasion when I was presented my wonderful tribute May 20, 2017.

It was a wonderful loving gift and I will treasure it and keep it in my heart forever.

Again, thank you, "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas", a most blessed 2018, and always remember -

I Love You.
Donna Kerley

Donna Caldwell becomes Donna Caldwell Kerley

Donna Caldwell is Bride

Frosted pink candles, baskets of pink gladioli, white lace and greenery enhanced the altar of the Alma Methodist Church June 26 for the 2 p.m. wedding of Miss Donna Ruth Caldwell and Robert L. Kerley.

The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Archie A. Caldwell, Alma, and the bridegroom is the son of Mrs. Frances Kerley and the late Teddy Kerley, Alma.

Rev. Omer Jones officiated. Jim Martin sang "Through the Years," "Always" and "O Perfect Love." Mrs. Martin was organist.

The bride chose a wedding gown of white peau de soie and Chantilly lace. Tiny seed pearls encircled the scooped neckline and the entire detachable lace train. Her nylon tulle veil was floor length. The bride wore a coiffure band of crystal and pearls and carried a cascade of large white mums surrounded by feathered mums. A cocktail orchid was attached to the center of the bouquet by pearls and lace.

Attending the bride were Mrs. Carole Ritter, matron of honor and Miss Diane McWhirter and Mrs. Sylvia Hester, bridesmaids. They wore floor length gowns of light frosted pink. Their short rose pink illusion veils were secured by five silk carnations shading from deep rose to light pink. They carried fresh feathered carnations in matching shades.

Mary and Linda Shuler were flower girls and wore floor length dresses of deep pink organdy.

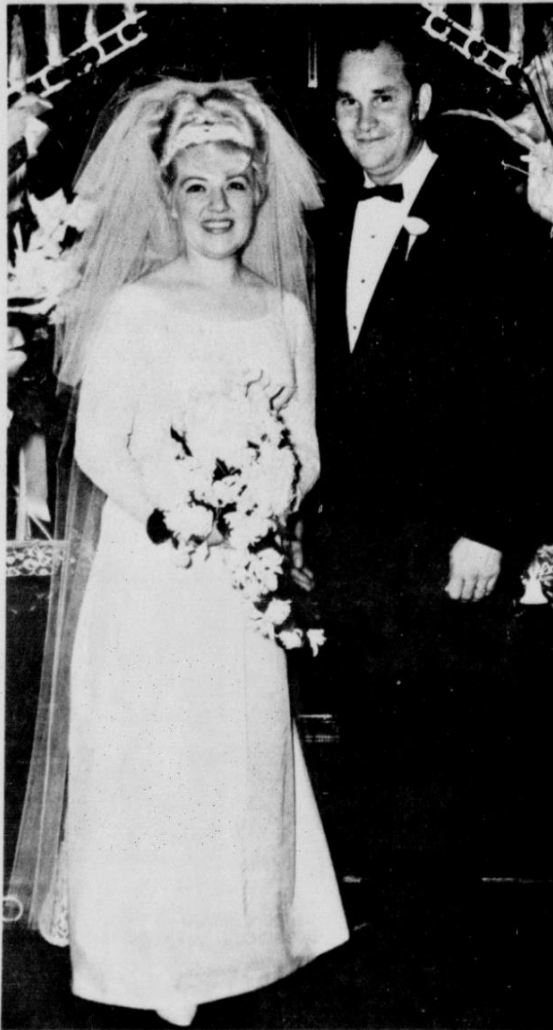
The bride's mother chose a rose beige lace dress and had a corsage of two moss green orchids. The bridegroom's mother wore a light blue linen sheath dress and had two white orchids.

Herb Williams was best man for the bridegroom and Jim Kerley and Morris Ritter were groomsmen. The ushers were Keith Smith, Alma, Bill Fisher, Centralia and Ron Lotz and Dale Boyles, Farina. Mike Lewis served as ring bearer.

David and Roger Purcell served as package carriers preceding the ceremony.

A reception was held in the church dining room immediately following the wedding. The following friends of the bride served at the reception table: Mrs. Alice Bringle, Wheaton; Mrs. Billie Jo Allison, Washington, D. C.; Mrs. Nancy Williams, Carlyle; Mrs. Becky Jones, Kinmundy and Miss Shelby Jones, Alma. Mrs. Sharon Johnson, Murphsboro had charge of the guest book. Miss Pam McWhirter, Miss Judy Shuler, Miss Susan Stubblefield and Mrs. Dorothy Boyles were in charge of the gift table.

The bride is a graduate of Centralia Junior College, and Southern Illinois University. In



MR. AND MRS. ROBERT L. KERLEY. She is the former Miss Donna Ruth Caldwell. (Autenrieth's Photos)

the fall she will enter her fifth year as Vocal Music Supervisor and instructor at the La Grove Unit School District, Farina.

The groom is a graduate of Central Illinois College of Barbering. He will continue his business in Alma and his employment with the Central and Eastern Illinois Railroad.

After the honeymoon, the couple will reside in Alma.

"Centralia Evening Sentinel"

— July 8, 1966

I married Robert L. Kerley on June 26, 1966 at the Alma Methodist Church. It was 106 degrees outside, and the church was definitely NOT air conditioned. When Bob kissed me at the end of the ceremony, it looked as though I was wiping off his kiss and it got a bit of a laugh at the church, but I was really wiping off sweat! It was so hot that day!

Bob and I had known each other most of our lives – we just grown up together. He had just graduated from Kinmundy when I started high school in Salem, but we were just a couple of Alma kids. Bob was a barber, worked with the railroad, drove a tractor once in awhile, milked a few cows, and planted a few acres.

I really didn't go out and look for a lot of singing jobs after I was teaching and married. Calls and letters would come in all the time asking me to come perform, and Bob was a real jewel about it all. He went right along with me, and helped me do all sorts of things, whether it was driving me to a show I was performing in in St. Louis or helping me with setting up a school variety show in Farina.

A couple of times while I was singing, men would offer to take me home from St. Louis. On the way home in the car, I would tell Bob about the offer. He'd laugh and say, "They did? Well, I hope you told them how far it was going to be to drive you home!"

I just hope he always knew just how much I loved him, because I truly did.



I Did It My Way

My parents sacrificed so much for me. All thru my childhood and youth, my mom had also been my manager in a way. She arranged for me to sing at all of these contests and events. I guess we were doing it for experience too. She knew I wanted to go as far as I could – or at least that’s what we thought at the time. We thought it would be nice to eventually make records, and she helped me work toward that, but as time went on, I learned more about how complicated the music industry was and all of the sacrifices it required such as being away from home and my family.

I found out very quickly in life that I didn’t want to make entertaining a full-time career. I was given advise that I needed to hire a manager, make a demo of my music, and have him lead me to the top. They’d tell me, “Get yourself a manager that’s going to help you, and go sell your music! People don’t know who you are. Locally is good, but it’s not going to get you very far.” But I knew that would send me city to city, radio station to radio station, and state to state, and I’d be traveling by myself – and that’s just the way it is. For some people, that’s the life they choose, and they are tickled to death to do that.

I wasn’t really anybody – I just had my big toe in the water to see what it was like. I was a baby, I was a pup, and I was a Mama’s girl! She was my partner, my mother, my agent, she just did everything with me.

But I had a life that I loved back home, and I wasn’t willing to give that all away for a dream that was uncertain ... and a lonely life ... and not knowing who to trust. Sure – you could have fame and money, but it wasn’t for me. I often wonder what type of life the people I met, who were at the top, were living. They seemed really nice, but did they have a family? Were they really happy? What did they sacrifice?

I’ve had a lot of fun in my life along with having a loving family, husband and home, wonderful friends, and a couple of careers that I enjoyed so much. I guess I just kept going on autopilot – and wherever it sent me, I went.

But deep down, I’ll always be just that farm girl from a little town called Alma who liked to sing and entertain, and make people happy. I have been so lucky, and

Oh .. I have so many wonderful memories!



*“Wonderful Memories” by Donna (Caldwell) Kerley
– as told to Dolores Ford Mobley” (October 2020)*