

## Notes on a Saxophone

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Have you ever gone snooping while staying at your grandparents' house? One afternoon many decades ago, my cousin Kathleen and I opened the door to my grandparents' storeroom located upstairs. We walked around looking at all the stuff and realized there were boxes of Christmas decorations and fabric, plus boxes of well-worn clothes and knick-knacks. Sitting in a corner was a large black case with a rope handle.

Our curiosity got the best of us, and we opened the black case. Lying inside on old, worn purple velvet was a silver saxophone. Kathleen was part of her high school band and immediately knew that this was a tenor saxophone. She picked it up and assembled the sax. She found an old reed and attached it to the mouthpiece and tried making a sound. I was impressed when she made a sound like a wounded duck. We laughed.

We put away the saxophone, walked downstairs, and talked with Grandma about our music find. She said it was Grandpa's saxophone and we better talk to him.

"So, you found my saxophone!" Grandpa began. "There's quite a history to that horn."

"Tell us! Tell us!" I begged Grandpa.

He sat back in his comfy chair and launched into his story. "I bought that silver saxophone from the Clarinda Community Band conductor many, many years ago. The band practiced weekly and gave concerts in the park on certain evenings. Grandma, your mom, Marilyn, and Ardith would come to town to listen to the concerts. Back then, it was quite an honor to play in the Clarinda Community Band." Lowering his voice, he said, 'I was a pretty good saxophone player!" He gave me a big smile.

Grandpa continued, "But I wasn't the only one who played that silver saxophone." There was a pause before he urged, "Would the next person who played this saxophone please come forward and continue the story?"

Everyone in the room looked around. My mom got up and walked over and sat beside my grandpa. "Well, Dad, I guess the next person was me."

"Mom! You played the saxophone?" I was amazed.

"I began playing this silver saxophone when I started high school. If it was good enough for my father, then it was good enough for me to play. I played it in concert band and marching band for four years." Then she lowered her voice and said, "I was a pretty good saxophone player too." I gave her a great big smile.

"But the saga of the saxophone doesn't stop there," my mom added. "There's someone else in the family who played that horn in high school. Even though he is not here, maybe his mom will continue the story."

Again, we looked around the room. Getting up was my Aunt Marilyn. She stood and walked over to my grandpa and sat down next to him. She began, "When your cousin Duane became interested in music, he started out playing that silver saxophone. After a couple of years, we were able to afford a new saxophone for him to play in high school. So, we brought the silver saxophone back here to Grandpa's house and put it away in the storeroom." She paused and said, "He was a pretty good saxophone player too."

I looked at my cousin Kathleen and asked, "How come you didn't play the saxophone? Upstairs, you made a sound on it."

She answered, "I used to be able to play that saxophone, but I was more interested in playing the trumpet, so I stuck with the trumpet for four years and on into college."

Grandpa looked at me and asked, "Are you interested in playing that silver saxophone?"

"Heck no, Grandpa. I want to play the drums," I answered. Grandpa laughed.

Fast forward a few years. The school's music instructor told me that I did not have the rhythm to play drums, and he asked what other instrument I would consider playing.

Thinking for a moment, I answered, "The tenor saxophone." The instructor said that was a pretty big instrument for me, but it was worth a try. He asked if I had access to a saxophone.

"Boy, do I!" I answered quickly.

It wasn't long until we drove to Grandpa's house, and Mom asked him if we could borrow the saxophone that was in the storeroom. He smiled and said, "Well, Jeanette, are you the next person to play this old horn?"

"I hope so, Grandpa."

Now my part of the story begins. I played Grandpa's saxophone while in the seventh and eighth grades. As high school began, the school's band instructor, Mr. Fisher, talked to my parents about buying a new saxophone for me.

The next weekend my family and I drove to Omaha to Hospe's Music Store so I could test different tenor saxophones. My hands were small, so I needed to find a horn with close fingerings. After much deliberation, I settled on a brass Buscher tenor saxophone. I played that horn for four years in pep band, marching band, concert band, and instrumental ensembles. In college I played it for one year. Eventually, I sold the saxophone to a high school music program.

And as I finish this story about the silver saxophone played by three generations, I'll whisper to you, "I was a pretty good saxophone player too!"