

Rock 'n' Roll Legend

By Jeanette Rhyan

Monday

Opening the door to the Student Activities Room, the campus operator said, "Jeanette, phone call. I think it's from Minneapolis. You can take it in the campus center office."

"Thanks, Phyllis," I replied walking to the office located right behind the switchboard.

"This is Jeanette," I said into the phone.

"Jeanette, this is Phil from Midwest Booking Agency."

"Phil, good to hear from you. It's been a while since we've talked."

"Jeanette, have I got a deal for you!"

"I'm listening."

"I've got a music act traveling from Denver to Chicago. They're looking for a place to play on Sunday night. Would Dana College be interested in an informal concert?"

"What do you mean *informal*?" I inquired.

"The group really doesn't want to perform an entire concert. They just want to sit and jam to their music and maybe work on some new material. What do you think?"

"You know our budget is limited to \$1,500," I told Phil. "This group can't be a 'big name' group if they're willing to settle for \$1,500."

Phil continued, "The lead member of the group has asked that we not tell you who is going to perform. Let me tell you, Jeanette, this concert will be well worth it."

"How soon do you need an answer? I have to talk to the person who writes the checks."

"Is tomorrow too soon? Let me know your answer before 5:00."

"Okay, Phil, I'll see what I can do. Thanks for calling. Talk to you tomorrow. Bye."

"That was a weird conversation," I said to myself.

Tuesday

The next day I talked with the Dean of Students, who oversees the Student Activities Board. I gave him all the pertinent information and then waited for his decision.

"Do you really want to spend \$1,500 on a music act you don't know?" the Dean asked.

"In the four years I've been on the activities board, Phil has never steered us wrong. He is well aware of our limited funds," I informed him.

The Dean of Students thought for a few moments and then finally said, "The old gymnasium is free that Sunday evening. As far as I know, the theater department doesn't have any props on the stage, so you should be good to go. I'll request the check and give you the key."

Walking out of the office, I said thank you and went to call Phil and tell him the good news.

Sunday Afternoon

After unlocking the door to the building, I walked up a few steps into the old gym. Standing in the doorway, I was amazed by what good shape the small gym was in. Walking around, I saw folding chairs were already set up where the bleachers used to be. The chairs would be good for those students who didn't want to sit on the floor. I continued to scan the room. The stage was clear of theater props, and the stage floor was clean. Everything was in good order for our mysterious concert.

Two Hours Later

Two large travel buses pulled into the parking lot. The first bus stopped near the door. When the bus doors opened, a group of men got out and asked where they were to set up the equipment. I led them into the building and pointed to the stage.

"Will this be enough room?" I inquired.

"Yes, ma'am. This will do nicely," one of the men replied.

I walked back out to the parking lot and stared at the second bus, which had parked behind the first bus. Who the heck was I waiting for?

Finally, the doors of the second bus opened, and out stepped B. B. King carrying his famous guitar, Lucille. "Oh, my gosh! Is this for real?" I asked myself. B. B. King was standing right in front of me!

"I was told to ask for Jeanette. Are you Jeanette?" he asked in his deep voice.

I stood there and stared at him. Finally, I stammered, "Yes, I'm Jeanette. Welcome to Dana College."

"We were told that we could jam here this evening for a few hours. No formal concert."

"Yes, that's the plan. You'll be set up and playing on the stage while the students will be sitting on the floor. The students will be coming and going throughout the evening. Will that be a problem?"

"No, that will be fine."

I escorted B. B. King into the building and showed him around.

“This will work nicely,” he finally said.

His road crew worked like a fine-tuned machine. Occasionally, I was asked where they could find something or whether they could move something. In no time, it was 6:00 and the informal concert began.

As they started to play, the sound of Lucille’s notes echoed off the walls of the old gym. It sounded awesome. All the musicians began to play the song “The Thrill Is Gone.” There is nothing better than hearing a good song played live. Too bad they didn’t play the entire song. For the next few hours, they played old familiar songs and a few new songs no audience had heard yet.

All too soon, it was 10:00 p.m., and the music stopped. The road crew started packing up the equipment, and it was time to leave. B. B. King gently placed Lucille back in her guitar case and walked off the stage.

Together, we walked to the bus, where I thanked him for a wonderful night of music.

“Thank you for letting us play tonight. We have a concert in Chicago in a few days, and then it’s into the recording studio to lay down some tracks. I just wanted some extra practice time,” he said as he stood by the bus door.

He gave me a hug and then climbed onto the bus. I waved as both buses left the parking lot.

Walking back to the dorm, I thought, “B. B. King for \$1,500. What a deal!”