

I first met Ron around 1988 at a summer band camp in Woodstock, NB. I was a recent university graduate who had five years of university training and the Music and Education degrees to prove it. I thought I knew a lot about how to run a band. Ron was very kind and warm to me and gave me many helpful words of advice. He then started talking to me about all these great new ideas he had just read about in this new book or the latest issue of *The Instrumentalist* - I was blown away! If Ron MacKay was still learning how to do this job, then I had a lot of work ahead of me. In the twenty years since that meeting, I worked hard to keep up! Forget about ever catching up - I just kept trying to keep the gap from growing!

I don't think it is possible to be a great music educator unless you are a great human being. I believe we all arrive on this earth with a purpose and I believe the highest purpose we can perform is to serve our fellow man. In the 20 years I knew Ron, I saw a man full of humility and kindness who went out of his way to help others. There wasn't a selfish bone in his body and he was always looking for new ways to help you succeed. He was an enabler - he gave us the confidence to find ourselves. He knew we could do better and wouldn't allow us to settle for less.

On the CEC Band members 1982 -86 Facebook page I found this entry:

We were practicing "The Barber of Seville" and I just could not play the finale correctly. Ron stopped the band and made me go over (and over) my part. He was getting more and more flustered with each of my failed attempts, which, in turn, was making me more than a little nervous. That was when my worst nightmare came true - Instead of firing a baton at me, he stomped right up and stood in front of me, told me to try again and began counting (by striking the stand with his baton) and singing my part (not quite at the top of his lungs, though close). After about 6 or 7 tries, I finally got it right. Ron immediately relaxed, flipped the hair back out of his face, and did the most unexpected thing – he smiled one of those great big grins at me and said, "Beautiful, thank you. Now why couldn't you just do that the first time?" Then just as quickly as he'd come up, he wheeled around, slipped back down to his stand and continued our rehearsal as though we hadn't stopped. It took a few seconds, but imagine my relief as I realized that he wasn't mad at me – it turned out that he knew that I could do it and was just frustrated that I didn't know I could.

It's not possible to succeed at the level Ron did without the love and support of family. On our many trips together he spoke with great pride and satisfaction of the achievements of his family. I know there were sacrifices you had to make for Ron so that he could help us. Thank-you for allowing Ron to share his gifts with us.

Last spring, I went out with Ron to help some local band directors recruit and test students for grade 6 band. Ron met us at one of the schools - dressed in a suit jacket and tie of course (and no white socks!) - ready to get to work. Watching Ron work with those young students was just magic. If you are not "real", students will shut you out in a minute.

I remember one young boy who was being tested for trumpet. The interaction between this 78 year old man and this 10 year old boy was truly amazing. You could tell that Ron's gentle manner and the aura he created had this young boy excited about the possibility of joining the band. Now what this young man didn't know was that he would make it into the band on some instrument - no matter what. But with his manner, the words he used and the way he used them he created a mystique, "maybe I won't be good enough", "maybe I can't do this" - and the relief when you are told by Ron MacKay that you are good enough.

Even in this short interaction Ron had created this mystique - this young man was on the cusp of what could be an amazing musical journey. After Ron completed the testing he let the young boy know that he would be able to succeed at playing the trumpet. The young boy pumped his fist and said "All Right!". In that short meeting Ron's love of music and young people charged that encounter to lead to a moment of energy and excitement that will probably stay with that young man for the rest of his life - the moment when he met the measure of this gentleman.

We had some great fun working together at Buckleys. I guess I was Ron's boss but I never felt that way - we got together frequently to talk about what had to be done and did our best to do it. We put together the Ron and Don show - that sent Ron and Don Hughes and Dalhousie University students to schools throughout the region. We did clinics and workshops and trade show and had a ton of fun doing it. Imagine me - a kid from Middleton standing next to the great Ron MacKay.

Ron took music and the people he worked with very seriously but he didn't take himself too seriously - he knew how to have fun. I have always enjoyed Ron's sense of humour. I remember Ron calling our friend Rex Harknett to ask if his music store might have any copies of Break Wind Overture in stock - Rex went to look for it and finally "got it" after ten minutes of searching his shelves. Several years ago Ron got a phone call from a band director asking if we had a copy of that Christmas music with the dogs - Ron couldn't figure out what the heck they were looking for - but didn't miss a beat - "I haven't heard that one - but if you can bark me a few bars I might be able to track it down..."

We also had great fun at Bruce Chapman's expense when we put Ron's remote control fart machine in the Musicstop booth at a Music Educator's conference. I snuck the speaker into their booth and every time Bruce bent down or leaned over Ron made sure he had the appropriate sound effect.

Also from the Facebook page comes this entry:

Ron told us the easy way to remember the name of composer Rimsky-Korsakov, was to think of "rip-your-corset-off" I have never forgotten that name. Thank you Ron, for your immeasurable contribution to the music world, your dedication to young people and for treating us no-talents **as well** as the best-talents.

I often told Ron that I admired his can-do attitude. The trucks of the Lunenburg Fire Department have a simple motto painted on their doors - Deeds not Words. That was Ron - Deeds not Words with a lot of Music not Words for good measure.

Last fall a Ron MacKay celebration took place in Cape Breton and a tribute dinner was held. I can't remember the story exactly as Ron told it, but it was a story I had never heard, it was about attending church in Truro. Ron stopped to speak to the minister as he was leaving church and apologized for having missed a number of recent services. He had been very busy with his bands and just hadn't been able to get to church. The minister assured Ron that that was just fine as he knew Ron was doing God's work every day and coming to church on Sunday shouldn't be of great concern.

Out of the Ron MacKay celebration weekend came the Ron MacKay 'Music for Life' Award. We finalized the Award in late March and Ron was very appreciative of the work that was done on his behalf. This Award will be administered through the Nova Scotia Band Association and will nurture community bands with financial support in memory of our dear friend Ron. Ron's family has asked that donations in his memory may be made to the Ron MacKay 'Music for Life' Award.

We will miss seeing you Ron and talking to you. But we will be hearing you for many, many years to come. In our hearts, in your compositions and arrangements, and every time a student in Nova Scotia plays in a school band. You were one of the founders of school bands in this province and as long as we all work to make sure that work does not come undone we will hear you.

Thank-you Ron for being our teacher and our friend.