

PTG
10/18/2010
Sherman Clay
Heritage Night

Michael Gill

Michael graduated from the piano hospital & training center in 1966. He worked in Florida for 6 months and hated it. Went to Ill, the WA DC, where he got a job with Dickery, then Wenatchee, then Sherman Clay in Seattle.

The whole thing with piano tuning is the person behind it, whether a machine is used or by ear. For Michael it takes a lot more patience to do by machine than by ear. There are few or no visually impaired young students coming into piano tuning. Now kids are offered computer training and a guaranteed job with the government.

M lived at the YMCA for three years until he got married. George Morgan, Don Gault, Jim Burton, Jack Casky, Bill Smith, Frank Hopfinger, and more were all such a great support team for Michael.

Someone brought them an Ebach. Michael couldn't figure out how to take it apart, so he took it to Bill. It did not have a shift pedal, and the action came apart in two sections – the treble and the bass.

Amil Frees was a great teacher, had extreme patience, and was excellent to work with.

Bill Smith

Bill Smith saved Jim Farris' marriage. A week after he had been married, all of Jim's tools had been stolen. Jim was able to supply Jim some tools so that Jim's wife

1989 Member of Note

1995 PTG Hall of Fame

For about ten years Bill had a shop in White Center. These were some of Bill's favorite memories. People would come in for a part and be talking two hours later.

In 1945 Bill was looking for a job. He went to the Veterans Headquarters on First Ave. to the employment department. The man asked if Bill would like to sell insurance. No. He fished around and pulled out a piece of adding machine paper with the words "Sherman Clay." In 1929 Bill's parents had bought a piano from Sherman Clay in Cashmere, WA; this was his first encounter with Sherman Clay. When Bill came up to the third floor of Sherman Clay, Mr. Jeff Riggs was on the telephone to California. He introduced Bill to Carl Johnson, who was quite a character. They were looking for a piano man. Oh, what the heck, come over here next Thursday. They came around every couple weeks to make sure Bill was still there. Frank Hopfinger was the outside man, and Bill was the inside man. Everything was done by hand. Bill did end up working on pianos.

Carl Johnson was going to leave on vacation for a couple weeks. He told Bill that Bill could work on pianos, but to be careful. Bill decided to recover key-tops, but accidentally left them on a radiator overnight. Bill worked there for many years until they fired everybody. They gave everybody no warning: they came up in a hard hat and said, "Well, boys, gather up your tools. We're closing up the shop."

Sherman Clay, set up a little shop in an old brewery on First Avenue. One day Bill's little alcohol lamp tipped over and ruined something, which was quite a job to repair. After that Bill left and set up his little shop in West Seattle. Working with piano tuners was an exhilarating experience, because they all had such different personalities. American Piano treated Bill very well. One day at a convention, Bill asked what it would take to carry a full inventory. The answer was \$40,000, which was beyond his means at the time; so Bill started building up his inventory in bits over time. Sherman Clay started sending pianos to Bill to work on. It was often hard to work on pianos because customers would be coming in constantly. His best times were mornings and late afternoons to get things done. Bill probably made more money selling parts than doing work.

One day a tuner came in and said, "I have a problem that you could maybe help me with. Do you have any springs like this?" Bill didn't, but offered to make one. Bill had the right gauge of brass spring wire; he made a jig and worked 4-5 hours on this spring. The guy came back to look at the spring, and said, "You know, I could order those from the piano shop for 12 cents apiece."

One time the elevator stopped at the second floor. At that time the third floor was washers & driers. When they got to the fourth floor they saw the pianos.

One of Bill's best experiences was making the Golden Hammer awards. He made 26 of them, which became increasingly more elaborate. Just recently he was thinking of making one for himself. To this day he is still carving birds out of piano hammers. The way that started was one day when he got disgusted with a grand hammer job. He had three bass hammers left over around 3pm. He started whittling on one of the hammers for kicks and made a little owl. When Bernie saw the owl sitting on the desk, she commented, "Well, you were sure busy today." The Asian hammers are a shard as rock; soaking doesn't work. His favorite hammers to carve are Steinway, after lacquering them. Bill made so many birds for an auction that the hammers cost around \$300. Bill made an ivory tusk out of 2800 hammer tails, using super glue.

Darrell Fandrich

In 1958 Darrell went to McVails School of Music. 1963 CA new chapter in Pomona & was their first president. He went back & forth from San Bernadino to Pomona on his Yamaha motorcycle. He started at Ralph Pierce Music. Bob & Jim Burton & Jack Casky had a piano shop where Darrell worked.

In 1989 Chris Trivelas and Darrell presented a Steinway with Darrell's new action in it. When people come up with a crazy idea, the answer is "go for it!" Either you do something new or you don't. Then you have to start figuring out how to make it work. What started Darrell was when he read Doldge; in the third or fourth chapter he wrote about seeking a patent on an improved upright action. Later he read that there had already been over 1100 other patents on the upright action, most of which had never been put into use. Some ideas had hobs, bumpers, hidden springs, and more. They all concentrated on trying to improve the speed of repetition and to improve the repetition when the key is raised slowly. Yet most of them did not deal with the floppy feel and the lost motion. Darrell spent the better part of a decade being totally obsessed with this concept. Superglue made it possible to undo the leather on the hammer butt, to insert a spring and to put it back together, in order to experiment which worked better. Persistence is better than stubbornness.

In 1989 Darrell looked at patents and paid to have them sent to him. Heather's father wrote Darrell's patents. The patent attorney said there are three kinds of patents. Pie-in-the-sky patents are unachievable, where the language is so broad that there is no conceivable means of understanding or accomplishing the description. An ego patent or share holders patent. A patent doesn't have to work. It just has to be not obvious and not patented before.

Darrell moved up here in 1973 when the convention was in St. Louis. It was the first year to do the Red Ball car race from Manhattan to Redondo Beach, CA. About thirty cars took off in the middle of the night from Manhattan. The fastest cars went around 80-90mph, and if they got a ticket or put in jail, that slowed down their time. Darrell wanted to race in this in the worst way. Del, Ken Service, Ray and Darrell pile into an Audi with four 5 gal cans of gas. They made it all the way to Little America before they had to fill, where they got a truckers discount for buying so much gas. When they got out in the country, Ken wanted to drive. Because he was legally blind he couldn't get a license. He took off and drove wonderfully well. They did the 1850 mile trip in 18 hours. Ken was always after the waitresses.

Frank Hopfinger

Frank was 26 when he started. He wanted to be an accordionist since he was nine years old. When he came back from the service, he didn't know what to do. In Yakima his brother told him there was a piano tuning class at the airport. Walter Craig gave a sales pitch. Frank asked him how soon he could get started, and Walter said "Monday," and that's how he got started. Although Frank hated taverns, his first gigs were playing the accordion in taverns. In a tavern down at South Park he met a left-handed guitar player who got Frank started. They got a violinist and another guitarist and started a group.

Harvey Coolen
George White
George Morgan
Don Gault
Jim Burton
Jack Casky