



WABASH COLLEGE

Class Agents Letter

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Class of 1958

Class Agent

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Nearly Labor Day, 2009

Dear Classmates,

There's good news tonight:

The Annual Fund went over the goal by 1%--\$3,124,303. 48 of your dear souls, 41.7% of the class, contributed some 26,500 dollars. We were joined by two of our classmates' widows. God bless 'em! And many thanks to all of you!

President White announced that the College's budget for 2009-10 is balanced. Wonderful news in these tough economic times and after a-not-so-good last financial year. The president and trustees made some hard choices, but I don't believe there will be any significant effect of the students.

The Kappa Sig's new house opened this semester, will be dedicated at Homecoming, and with that the renovations/new constructions of the fraternity houses are completed. Plans for new or renovated dorms and campus center are on hold for the time being. Ditto for the changes to the athletic fields.

The Class of 2013, 250 strong, was rung in by President White on August 22. Who says all-male colleges can't get excellent students?

The Little Giant footballers are ranked 18th nationally and first in the NCAC. I don't know, but the rankings scare me. Our guys were highly ranked the last two years and those louses from Greencastle ruined two fine seasons. Or what would have been two fine seasons! The DePauw coach, Matt Walker, a Crawfordsville boy, up and quit two weeks before the season began. ??? He was a good coach and I'm glad he's gone. I don't know many DePauw "men" and the ones I do, I detest. However, Matt Walker's dad, an oral surgeon in Crawfordsville and a DePauw alumnus, is A-OK. Boy, you don't know how much it hurts me to say that! It's much more fun to hate them.

Don Nordlund '59 sent me the enclosed piece from the Trib about Dave Phelps.

Take care,

Gordon

Obituaries LEGACIES

DAVID HILL PHELPS 1936-2009

Jazz pianist played in clubs for 50 years

Vast music repertoire, versatility made him 1st-rate accompanist

By Trevor Jensen
TRIBUNE REPORTER

David Hill Phelps first played as a professional pianist in north suburban roadhouses while still in high school and over the next 50 years performed steadily at venues including the Gaslight Club, Jazz Limited and the Cypress Inn.

Mr. Phelps, 72, died Tuesday, April 28. He collapsed on an Evanston street corner after a heart attack and was taken to Evanston Hospital, where attempts to revive him were unsuccessful, said his sister, Elizabeth Phelps Kelly.

A journeyman pianist who specialized in stride style for traditional jazz bands, Mr. Phelps carried a vast repertoire of music in his head and played with top musicians, including trombonist George Brunis.

"He knew all the tunes, he was a terrific piano player," said Jim Clark, whose six-piece band, Jim Clark's Jazz People, held forth at



David Hill Phelps

Northbrook's Cypress Inn (and its subsequent incarnation as the Landmark Inn) for 32 years, about 15 of them with Mr. Phelps on piano.

At the Gaslight Club—a chain of swank key clubs, Mr. Phelps was the house pianist and worked on musical numbers with the "Gaslight Girls."

"He'd coach the girls and try to teach them jazz phrasing," said Mead Killian, who met Mr. Phelps at Wabash College and later took

"He became a very good accompanist to singers. He could play in any key, and singers sometimes sing in very strange keys."

—Local musician John Blegen

piano lessons from him.
"He became a very good accompanist to singers," said local musician John Blegen. "He could play in any key, and singers sometimes sing in very strange keys."

Mr. Phelps was born in Highland Park. His father died when he was 1, his mother three years later, and he was raised by his maternal grandparents.

"They had a piano in the house, and he was picking out songs before he started school," his sister said. At Highland Park High School, he played drums in the school band and piano at nightclubs outside town, his talent beating the fact that he was underage, she said.

Mr. Phelps was shy and self-effacing throughout his life, especially as a young man, when an untreated cleft palate made it difficult for him to speak clearly. That might have been one of the reasons

he gravitated toward music, his sister said.
"His piano spoke for him," she said.

He received a liberal arts degree from Wabash College, pounding away on an upright piano in the basement of his fraternity house and playing in clubs around the Crawfordsville, Ind., school.

Back in Chicago, he studied at the American Conservatory of Music and was told to give up jazz for a year and concentrate on classical music. He did, and retained a lifelong appreciation for classical, but quickly returned to jazz as a professional musician.

The late-night life of a musician caught up to him in middle age, and he struggled with drinking before quitting with the help of Alcoholics Anonymous. For the rest of his life, he stayed sober and was generous in helping others trying to do the

same.

He never drove, relying on public transportation and rides from fellow musicians. About 10 years ago, his longtime apartment building in Chicago's Rogers Park neighborhood went into, and he moved to the McGaw YMCA in Evanston.

He thought the move would be temporary and had his Steinway grand piano moved to a niece's home. But he found life at the YMCA suited him and stayed there until his death.

Without a piano of his own, he practiced in music rooms at Northwestern University. A security clampdown after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks put an end to that, and he was frustrated by not being able to play as often as he would have liked, Blegen said.

Drawing and painting in watercolors provided a diversion, and Mr. Phelps often could be found on the Evanston lakefront with his easel and brushes.

Besides his sister, there were no immediate survivors.

A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. May 16 in the King Home, 1555 Oak Ave., Evanston.

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