

DON BURNHAM (1923-2022)

by Kristen Hunter

Grandpa chose to join Grandma. Donald H. Burnham was a man who truly lived an extraordinary life. He was with my parents when he passed, he was never in pain, and he was never alone. Our hearts are broken and we are holding onto our memories and making peace with the plans of adventures we were about to have together.

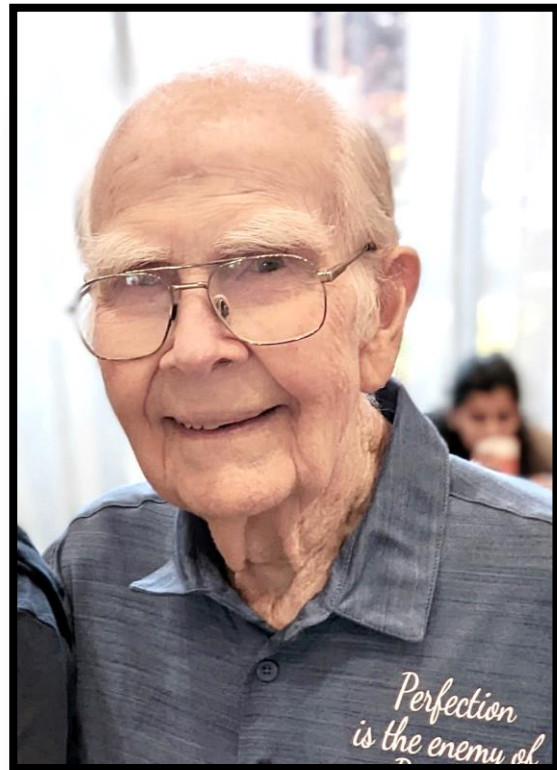
Grandpa lived for 99 years. He saw the world evolve and was witness to some of the biggest historical events. His body was tired, but his mind was sharp and quick-witted. Grandpa actively chose to live after Grandma passed away in August. He moved in with my mother and father, and we all got to see Grandpa grow stronger physically and mentally, sing, make jokes, continue trying new things, and remain resilient. I am so thankful he was embraced and nurtured so he could give us the gift of time.

Two of Grandpa's favorite quotes – “Perfection is the enemy of progress” by Winston Churchill, followed up with “You can't roller skate in a buffalo herd, but you can be happy if you've a mind to” by Roger Miller – will continue to influence our lives.

I've never met anyone who could remember and sing songs like Grandpa. No matter where he was or what he was doing, songs would burst from him and he would sing with pride. When he would burst into song, we all knew to pause and appreciate his singing, because that was his way of sharing his heart and mind. One of my favorite moments of this was recently at my home when he saw the moon through our front window and he began to sing. It was evident he was singing to Grandma. I can hear his voice and can visualize him taking off his hat and putting it over his heart as he emotionally and joyfully sang of seeing her again. May we all be so lucky to have such eternal love.

His curiosity, creativity, focus and passion drove him to live his life to the fullest. Grandpa was overflowing with knowledge and was always looking for opportunities to share with the people around him. Grandpa was an engineer through and through. In his final days, he was creating a pulley system so when he came to stay with us in a few weeks, he could open all doors independently while using a walker. He never stopped learning.

When I think of Grandpa, I think of breaking into song, dancing with him, Java chip ice cream,



watching my mother waltzing with him around the room at the Thursday night dance group in Saratoga, epic Easter egg and candy hunts, sharing a Diet Coke together, camping, happy hours, Disneyland, getting excited about his new custom e-trike, hearing stories of his childhood, especially ones about the animals he used to care for, spotting football calls instantly, and so much more.

Seeing him rise to the occasion of being a great grandfather to my brother's children and mine was such a gift. He actively made memories with each child and got to know what makes them unique. One of the memories I will cherish forever was just three hours before he passed. He got a running hug from his 18-month-old great-granddaughter, and they blew kisses to each other as I said, “We love you and we will see you next week” and his great-grandson, with a gleam in his eye, yelled, “Bye-bye, GG!”

We will celebrate Grandpa and continue to admire his resiliency, endless knowledge, and wit. Please raise a glass to Grandpa; he is loved, remembered, admired, and we will burst into song in his honor.

Thank you for the memories, Grandpa. “I'll find you in the mornin' sun, and when the night is new, I'll be looking at the moon, but I'll be seeing you.”

What We Leave Behind

by Adony Beniares

Over the last few years, we've lost many of the important people who influenced and encouraged me, and many others on our folk dancing journey. Today I'd like to share my thoughts about Don Burnham.

For those of you who didn't know Don, he and his wife, Maxine, were core members of the San Francisco Bay Area folk dance community for over 50 years. They organized, participated in, and helped out many groups on the Peninsula. They also ran the dance group at the Sierra Family Camp for more than 20 years. His and Max's relationship with their family was also amazing; hearing any conversation with a family member showed you how much they loved and supported each other.

Don was also a very clever and lighthearted jokester, sharing his puns and witticisms, without ever being overbearing. He had the unique ability to shift from lighthearted discussions to the business at hand in a flash.

Before I started dancing and came along with Becky to parties to hang around, eat, and chat, Don and Max would engage me in conversation, occasionally encouraging me, without insisting, to try dancing, and never making it uncomfortable for me to say no.

In 2005, when I became an active dancer, Don and Maxine were there to support me in my learning, whether as a teacher of dances or as part of the dance community showing me the steps behind the line. To this day, I can't dance Dramskoto, Japanese Soft Shoe, Hora Mare, Polka Dot, Elvira, and many other dances without thinking of Don's teaching and leading.

Being a tech hobbyist, I proposed to the Palomanians class leaders that they update their sound system, and consider moving their collection of mini-disks to mp3s. Don, having done a huge amount of the work to initially record and categorize the music collection, was very supportive. We had many conversations on the best methodology for the project to ensure the best quality of recordings, as well as the information we wanted to capture as part of the conversion. Don was clear and supportive when reviewing my work and the many mistakes I made during conversion. He understood my strengths in tech and my weakness in knowing the more than 3,000 tunes that needed to be converted.

When I wanted to do something that Don thought wasn't necessary, such as getting a new sound system or integrating other groups' music into our collection, he would ask me why I needed to do it, and agreed to it as long as I had a good reason.

On the personal side, having a good work ethic, I always marveled at the amount of work Don put into our folk dance world. He was always one of the first to get to know new dancers, taking their picture, and adding them to the photo roster which has helped so many of us get to know each other over the years. He and Max worked tirelessly into their 90s creating and supplying refreshments for our monthly parties, always taking complete ownership of the equipment, setting up and tearing down everything so it was ready for the next party.

Another example of how supportive Don had to do with the collection he gave me of a series of square dance recordings, some with calls. He encouraged me to listen and study them, saying that he thought I could develop those skills. I have recently been enjoying learning and calling contras. I hadn't thought of that conversation for years, and it warmed my heart to remember his encouragement.

In addition to the amazing family Don and Maxine raised, what Don leaves behind to the folk dance world will live far beyond anyone's remembrance of him or us. What better legacy for a person who was always there with a smile, an idea, and a great amount of energy.



Don Burnham and Maxine in 2017. Photo by L. Tucker.