

REMEMBERING DAN BIED

Native son chronicled popular history

A year after the passing of one of Burlington's favorite sons, the memory of Dan Bied lives on.

Active up to the day of his death on March 25, 1998, the tireless 72-year-old author/local historian, artist and jazz aficionado has left behind a legacy of 12 published works, a string of newspaper columns dating back to 1972, a love for music, and a sporadic collection of watercolor prints.

He wrote in the preface of his eighth published work, "Dan Bied's Memories," that "doing a book, albeit a soft-covered one, is consistent with a retirement philosophy that requires me to do something I consider worthwhile now and then. I don't feel it necessary to do something notable every day, but often enough to let Burlington know I am still around." Bied appears to have accomplished his goal and his impact on Burlington continues to be felt today.

His wife, Millie, remembers him as a man who enjoyed life and "didn't like worldly things" -- a trait she believes he acquired as a result of time spent as a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II. Bied's experiences were fuel for three books.

Today, Millie stays busy answering phone calls and letters from Dan's many acquaintances. "Musicians call and a doctor from New York calls just to see how I'm doing," she says. "I also heard from someone from the 106th Division -- from Minnesota, I think -- who saw an article about Dan on the web." Recently, she also gave permission to the editor of "The American Rag," a national jazz publication, to run excerpts from some of Dan's writings.

Using memorial donations left in Dan's name, the music he and Millie loved returned to the Burlington river front last year when the first annual Steamboat Days/Dan Bied Memorial Jazz Festival was held on June 15. Bringing jazz back to Steamboat Days was something Dan, who was chairman of the first Steamboat Days celebration in 1963, would have liked to have seen, according to Millie.

The festival has enough money in the till to continue for at least another two to three years, according to Steamboat Days committee member John Billups. "I think it will become a perpetual event," Billups said. "We'll be seeking donations over the next couple of years and looking for sponsors so the jazz festival goes on ... and I don't think that will be a problem." The festival currently is offered as a free event -- a Steamboat Days pass is not required -- and Billups said the committee is looking at the possibility of holding the festival outdoors this year.

Bied's first book on jazz, "Jazz Memories," was published in 1994 and received positive reviews in nine jazz journals. The second book, "Dan Bied's Jazz Reader," released in September 1997, featured more personal memories, photos, interviews and reviews.

Whenever the Bieds attended a jazz performance, "Dan took notes on every song," Millie said. "He was always writing. That's how I remember him."

One of his on-going projects was a weekly column for the Shopper Spree. General manager Mike Delaney received "a tremendous amount of feedback" after making the decision to rerun some of Bied's "good old days" articles. Twenty-six years in the making, the collection will continue to run indefinitely, according to Delaney. "Dan was so pro-Burlington and such a positive person and influence on the community," Delaney said. "It wasn't like Dan was going to be (soon) forgotten." Delaney first met Bied while playing guitar with Jim Menard's jazz combo.

"Dan used to come and listen to us perform," Delaney recalled. A longtime employee of the Iowa Ordnance Plant, Bied left Mason & Hanger in 1956 and pursued a career as a newsman, first at a local radio station and then at the Burlington Hawk Eye. After more than 11 years in journalism, he returned to IAAP until his retirement on Nov. 21, 1987. It was during this time that he began to work on his books and columns.

"Dan was always pleased to see things in black and white," Millie said. Which, she adds, was not an easy accomplishment for a man who did all his work while typing with one finger on a manual Royal 440. Millie and Dan were married in 1973, one year after they were introduced by mutual friends. Always the eternal bachelor, Bied was 48 years old at the time. Ten years earlier, in 1963, Bied produced two watercolor prints that are now considered his best, according to Lois Rigdon, director of the Arts for Living Center. Reproductions are still available for purchase at the gift shop, she said. Bied was often praised for his use of reds and blues and other "almost straight out of the tube colors with a lot of vibrancy," Rigdon said.

She also commented that Dan's rendition of Snake Alley was reproduced into placemats and used for a number of years at the former Suburban Club, a favorite restaurant for locals on U.S. 34. The other print was of a red barn at Cascade Landing located at the gun club under Cascade Bridge.

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