

Dan Radford

Daniel J. Radford was born January 13th, 1928 in South Minneapolis to Cyril and Sophie Radford



When Dan was eight years old his parents asked him if he wanted to play an instrument. Dan was sick of hearing his two older sisters, Zoy and Marilyn, practice piano, but he had heard a gramophone recording of the great virtuoso Fritz Kreisler, so Dan said he wanted to play violin. Dan's father, Cyril, was a streetcar motorman and he remembered seeing a man with a violin case get off the streetcar nearby their home. In short order Dan was taking lessons from that man, John Gocha, a member of the Minnesota Orchestra who lived nearby. Mr. Gocha was a strict German taskmaster, but Dan did well under his tutelage, and he spent the next ten years taking lessons from him.

During the Korean war, Dan was drafted into the army and was stationed in the southeast U.S. It was in the army that Dan was introduced to something other than classical music. Some of the fellow soldiers had bluegrass jams when they were off-duty and Dan wished to join, so he wrote to his parents to ship his violin to him. When the violin arrived, he discovered that it had been poorly packed, and it was smashed to bits. However, Dan was able to find a local luthier to repair it and in short order his trusty old violin became a fiddle. His parents and Mr Gocha referred to the music he learned in the army as hillbilly music.

Dan Radford

After being discharged from the army Dan went to the University of Minnesota and earned a degree, married Phyllis Forsman and got a job working as a high school shop teacher. Dan worked for four years teaching high school, but he soon realized that he could make more money, and set his own hours, by contracting himself out and building custom homes.

Dan liked going out boating with his growing family, which eventually totaled six children. They would cruise out on the Mississippi near Spring Lake, or up the St Croix to Kinnikinic and spend the night anchored by an island or a sandbar. At that time there were lots of people camping out on the rivers and jamming till all hours of the night. They organized into a group and called themselves “The Rivermen.”

Sometime in the 1960s, Dan had a friend, Bill Conlan, who wanted to get a job performing at a downtown St Paul restaurant. Dan came along to play backup for his friend. They did well enough on stage in an empty restaurant, so the owner told them to come back later that evening and he might consider hiring them as a band. Bill and Dan regrouped themselves in the restaurant basement, threw together a playlist and ran through their songs. They finished just in time to step directly to the stage of the restaurant. There was standing room only. People were piled three deep at the bar. Dan was scared as heck. They played the gig, and must have done pretty good, because they got the job and became “The Gallivanter.” Dan found that he could supplement his construction income by playing gigs in the evenings.

Dan Radford



In 1983, after a battle of six and a half years, Dan's wife, Phyllis, died of breast cancer.

Dan joined a support group for widows and widowers and met Orpha. They got married in 1985.

During this time Dan had thrown himself into music.

Shortly after their marriage, Dan and Orpha went on a trip to Alaska and happened to meet a man from Cotton, Minnesota who was also vacationing in Alaska. The man told Dan about a fiddle contest that was held each year in that town. The encounter was so unexpected that Dan decided to try competing in the contest. Through this contest, and others, Dan met and befriended Elmo Wick and a group of fiddlers who banded together in 1986 and founded the Minnesota State Fiddlers Association.

Dan was also involved in the creation of the Dakota Valley Civic Orchestra also in 1986.

Dan continued playing with in "The Gallivanter", but Dan also joined a second band, called "Timbre Junction" which went on a trip to Europe in 2007 where they performed on stage at a bluegrass festival in Abeliiget, Hungary.

Dan was instrumental in bringing the Fiddlers Association Fiddle Contest to the Minnesota State Fair, and for many years he made the trophies for the winners of the Minnesota State Fair Fiddle

Dan Radford

Contest in his shop. He was also president of the Minnesota Fiddlers Association for many years.



Dan Radford died November 28th, 2018.

Dan was more than a fiddle player, he was also a singer, guitarist, composer and story teller. His best-known composition is Orpha's Waltz which he wrote sometime after 1985. Of this song he would introduce it as follows:

Dan Radford

"I had been working on this waltz for my bluegrass group and when I finished it I thought, Gosh, this is such a beautiful tune, it deserves to have a pretty name, something like... Rachelle or Suzanne. But then I thought about my wife. And she would ask me: Who is Rachelle? or Who is this Suzanne? So, I decided to name it Orpha's Waltz... after the prettiest girl I know."

Daniel J. Radford (Obituary from the Star Tribune)

Radford, Daniel J. 90, Bloomington, passed away on November 28, 2018. He is preceded in death by his first wife, Phyllis, great-granddaughter, Eva Tobon, both parents and all his siblings. He is survived by his wife, Orpha; children, Sandy (Jim) Coder, Linda (Randy) Preston, Becky (Steve) Ness, Sam (Laura) Radford, Priscilla (Dave) Schafer and Andy Radford; 19 grandchildren; 28 great-grandchildren and Orpah's family, children, Ed (Hannah) Borgen, Al (Kathy) Borgen, Dave (Cindy) Borgen, Karen (Kelly) Lungstrom, Jon (Leticia) Borgen and Linda Borgen; 13 grandchildren; 20 great-grandchildren and counting and numerous extended family and friends. Memorials preferred to Mount Hope Lutheran Church or Trinity First Lutheran School at 1115 East 19th St. Minneapolis, MN 55404. Memorial Service Monday, December 3, 2018 at 1 p.m. with visitation 2 hours prior at Mt. Hope Lutheran Church 3601 West Old Shakopee RD, Bloomington, MN 55431. Interment will take place at a later date at Lebanon Hills Cemetery, Apple Valley, MN. Washburn-McReavy.com Werness Brothers 952-884-8145