



## Final Curtain

Some time ago, I found a small envelope in my mailbox, and the return address was that of my parents over in Vancouver. This is a bit unusual, because these days we have constant contact by email and video telephone, so there isn't much need for sending letters to each other. But when I opened it, I understood why they had used the post - inside was a newspaper clipping. It was something they thought would be of interest to me, and they were right. It was clipped from the obituary page; my high school music teacher had passed away.

Now for my parents - who are in their eighties - seeing a familiar name on the obituary page is nothing unusual at all, but for me, it is a novel experience, and I was quite surprised by this news. Back in high school, I was intensely interested in music, so this man was one of the teachers who - for better or worse - had quite an influence on me.

(Now that I think about it, I can't recall the name of a single other teacher from high school days; not even their faces. So that fact that I do remember this man perhaps tells its own story!)

I lived in the music room during those years. Along with a few other similarly inclined students, I felt that it was my 'home' all through high school. Other students might head for the gym after class, to shoot baskets; me and my buddies headed for the music room, to spend hours in the cramped practice rooms making music together. The music teacher never had to spend time on such things as sorting out sheet music, cleaning instruments, or arranging the classroom - we did all those things for him. All he had to do was direct our enthusiasm into sensible directions.

Here in Japan we hear about the way in which the 'club' culture at school can take over students' lives, but it happens in other countries too! Every year, our school put on a musical, and this was no trivial task; we did real Broadway shows. The music teacher contacted a company in New York, and arranged for a complete package of materials to be sent to us - professional orchestrations, scripts, prompt books, conductor scores, lighting charts, and everything needed to put on a 'real' production of a show.

It didn't involve just the music students of course, drama classes provided actors, woodwork classes built scenery, accounting classes ran the box office, etc. etc. Pretty much the whole school got involved, and for a couple of months, our lives were dominated by the production.

We had no orchestra in our school, just a band, so we had to adapt the orchestrations as well as we could. I remember sitting there in the 'pit' with my flute, trying manfully to tackle the violin parts from the orchestration - page after page of cascading notes. The piano player in the centre of the group provided the 'core' to our performances, keeping everything basically held together. I can't imagine what it must have sounded like, but the audiences were enthusiastic, and these were wonderful learning experiences for us all.

As you know, I wasn't to become a professional musician after all, but that's not the important thing. I'm glad that my school environment - and this enthusiastic teacher in particular - provided an outlet for our energies, and a structure for gaining wonderful experience.

Going by the dates in his obituary, I see that he was actually only 14 years older than me. Definitely too soon for an appearance on the obit page ...

**David Bull**  
**Seseragi Studio**  
**Nagabuchi 8-4-5 Ome City**  
**Tokyo Japan 198-0052**  
**<http://astoryaweek.com>**