

## **Wish You Were Here**

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Did you know I was a Dame? I don't mean "dame" in the gangster way Frank Sinatra said it in 'Robin and the Seven Hoods' as a slang term for a woman -- like a "broad" or a "doll." And I don't mean like those upside-down mop dance partners of the sailors in 'South Pacific' who sang "There is Nothing Like a Dame." I mean Dame in the most formal sense, like a female member of the Order of the British Empire, the distaff version of a Knight of the Realm.

Of course in our mythical realm of Rosaria, the knights are the Royal Rosarians, the men (and women) in the white suits and straw hats. And back in the early 90s, I had the honor of being chosen for knighthood by Prime Minister Scott Stuhl after being nominated by one of the true gentlemen I've known in my life, Ev Weis -- a Rosarian who worked on the parade committee for several years and who has since passed away. It was a pleasure to juggle my crazy schedule and find time on one of the busiest days of my year -- the day before the Grand Floral Parade -- to join the dozens of local and national notables who are recognized in this formal ceremony.

When you're chosen for this acknowledgment, you're asked to choose a rose under which you'll be knighted. My choice? Showbiz, a bright red floribunda that for some reason elicited a few giggles when I was announced at the Amphitheatre of Washington Park.

Hundreds of people have been knighted by the Rosarians over the 85+ years of the tradition, people like John Philip Sousa, Hopalong Cassidy, actor Jimmy Stewart, Lawrence Welk, Mouseketeer Jimmie Dodd and Mickey Mouse himself. Every year lots of admirals and festival representatives from around the region are knighted. So it's an honor to have been included.

Last week I went to a funeral, one of life's sad but inevitable rituals -- a different kind of 'special event.' Jim Henderson, 1996 Prime Minister of the Royal Rosarians, passed away after a battle with cancer; and as expected, he was honored with a full-blown Rosarian rite. Jim, one of the mainstays of the organization that has flourished in Portland since 1912, had been ill for a while, and I'm sorry to say I can't even remember the last time I had the chance to talk with him. I'm sure if it was at an official festival event, he probably chided me for not wearing my knighting medal. He was always telling me there was a charge for forgetting to wear it.

And guess what? I wore my Rose Festival uniform (which for us at the Association is a navy blazer and tan slacks or skirts) and forgot the medal. One last time.

Ironically, Jim was knighted under the rose 'Centennial' -- and now he'll miss the big celebration. After the service I said to Tom Wright (another 'Duke of the Realm' -- the title

for past Rosarian leaders) that no doubt plenty of Rosarians will carry the memory of Jim with them as they march in this year's parade -- Jim and many others.

And isn't that part of the role all of us will play this year -- representing all those who have gone before us and can't be here with us for the festival?

Last fall the Rose Festival Association lost one of our longtime board members, Wayne Huddleston, someone I worked with for more than 20 years and considered a real pal. Wayne was a man with a passion for so many things in life -- for travel, for history and for many Rose Festival events. He was last year's chairman of the Portland Arts Festival and a longtime operations vice-chair for the Grand Floral Parade. Last June his illness prevented him being on his feet during the parade, so he sat next to me in the command post and shared his thermos of hot coffee. I'll never forget having him there during the three most stressful hours of the year. I think he loved watching the action from that unique vantage point for the first time.

I wish it hadn't been the last time. It was a difficult and bitter realization when I knew he wouldn't be with us for the Centennial.

The Rosarians produce another event every year that serves as an unofficial kickoff to the festival, a religious ceremony held on a Sunday in April called the Royal Rosarian Blessing and Memorial Service. Part of this service includes recognition of those members of the Rose Festival's key supporting organizations who have passed away during the preceding year. This event was a couple weeks ago, and two of the Association's past presidents and one board member -- Wayne -- were among those remembered. I like this event because it acknowledges the past while looking to the future, which is exactly what we're working so hard to do with this year's Centennial celebration.

There are many individuals I'll be thinking of this June as the Centennial events rush by all too quickly. Certainly one of those is my own mom, the person who first taught me to love the Rose Festival. I like to think that Mom, just like many other festival-lovers who came before her, would be proud of what we've accomplished with our efforts to make a spectacular celebration for this Centennial.

To all of them -- Mom, Wayne, Ev and Jim -- I can only repeat the kind of message people have been writing on their Rose Festival postcards since the days when they cost a penny to mail:

We're having a wonderful time with the 2007 Rose Festival.

Wish you were here.