

Life of Duncan MacLean Celebrated



Duncan MacLean circa 1994

The life of Duncan MacLean, a longtime friend of The Community, was celebrated Saturday, June 18, 2011, at one o'clock in the afternoon at the Chapel of The Holy Child. More than two hundred were in attendance. A wake followed at Clary's Bar and Grill in Reno.

The service, full of music and fond memories, was presided over by the Rt. Rev. Gene Savoy Jr. Duncan's wife, the love of his life, Elizabeth, delivered a heartfelt and beautifully composed eulogy in memory of her many years with Duncan. Memories were shared by Mr. Donnie Macdonald and Mrs. Phyl Smith, who were friends of Duncan for nearly thirty years, and the Rt. Rev. Sean Savoy, who shared harrowing and happy memories of Duncan from expeditions to Peru in 2000 and 2005 as well as reading the well-known "Desiderata," which contained words that Duncan tried to live by. (Read the Order of Service here from the memorial program:

[DuncanMaclean.memorial.program.](#))

The memories shared by Donnie Macdonald follow:

I am Donnie Macdonald, from the Isle of Lewis in Scotland, and I came over to the Los Angeles area 28 years ago next week. I am here today with my wife Phyllis, who is my reason for moving to the Sacramento area, and we have been living in Citrus Heights for almost 20 years. Our daughter Fiona is very fond of Duncan and Elizabeth, and in our household we refer to Unkie Dunkie!

I knew Duncan before coming north. The Scottish Games in Dixon, Oakland, Santa Rosa, would have been where we got acquainted, although I don't have a clear memory of meeting him. But suddenly he was there. Singing, chit-chatting, joking, taking the mickey, wearing the Hunting MacLean kilt, always in the best of spirits, and always ready for fun. Although I realized that this was a person of great significance, I was not aware of his Scottish pedigree until much later when he told me stories about his father, Duncan MacLean Senior's, stage career working with Harry Lauder back in the day. The gene of the entertainer was born in Duncan, and he embraced the Vaudeville spirit better than anyone I knew. He could focus on life's experience, and compose a meaningful song to suit the day. Always the entertainer. Behind the footlights, or in a one on one conversation. Always the entertainer, open to creativity and looking for an angle.

Phyllis and I got married in Sept '92. The reception was held in a modest club-house in the redwoods, by the Russian River, which reminded me of the typical village hall back home. Duncan and Elizabeth were there along with Kris Anderson and his wife Diana. At that time Duncan, Kris and I were having some musical fun together under the name of the Ceilidh Cowboys. Last week I sat through a few hours of video from that evening and was amazed to see Duncan singing a Harry

Lauder medley. Why was that amazing? Because he had explained that he had learned it from an old 78 record that had a deep scratch, and in the interests of authenticity he invited a lady to join him at the mike to vocalize the scratch while he sang. It was a brilliant ploy, and instinctively spontaneous.

Later that same evening the very static, tripod mounted, video camera was trained on the vacant mike stand, while people danced to a variety of taped music. Then the song *Unchained Melody* by the Righteous Brothers is filling the room on the audio. Just when it starts Duncan happens to be walking past this vacant mike stand and immediately puts his glass down and gets behind the mike and expressively mimes the song. When it came to that high note, his whole body was arched back. Duncan would never miss a trick. And you will all have your own personal examples of that.

Duncan laid all the bricks in our front yard, and there are a lot of them. I acted as his labourer, and with full awareness of my own lack of skill, I would respond to the most mundane task with a cheerful "Where I shine". Duncan tried this phrase out on some labourers around the Reno building sites to no avail. They were not in that groove, I guess.

When Duncan and Elizabeth got married at the Sacramento Games in Roseville, Don MacRae was officiating, Dani was the bride's maid, and I was the best man. It was easy. There was no rehearsal that I can remember. Don MacRae told me that it would be a little different, but not to worry, I had only to get two things right. Make sure I have the ring, and secondly, when Don walked around the couple with a stick leaving a circular mark in the soil, I was to take the broom and circle the couple obliterating the marks left by the stick. Well, that all happened just as planned, but on taking this broom in my hands I had time to catch Duncan's eye and mouth the phrase, "Where I shine".

The night before the wedding I took Duncan to the Irish Pub &

Restaurant Gallagher's on Folsom Blvd. They served real good lamb shanks, and that is what we both had that night.

Speaking of food, one night back in the 90's, Duncan and I had a marathon at our kitchen table in Citrus Heights. We had had pasta for dinner at 7pm. Around 9pm Phyllis and Fiona went off to bed. Duncan and I are chatting and listening to a cassette of the Glasgow folk singer Matt McGinn, and there is a bottle of Bowmore single malt on the table. Trader Joe held the price at \$24.99 for the longest time, which pleased Duncan. Around 10pm we get a little peckish and we finish off the pasta. Around 2am Duncan confessed that he could eat something given the opportunity. The fridge did not have much to offer except a few tortillas. In the garage I found a frozen 10 pound chunk of haggis, broke off a piece and nuked it. We ended up the night wondering if that was the first ever "Haggis Burritos".

I don't think we realized it at the time, but for the best part of a couple of decades we had been living in a kind of wilderness in comparison to what was to come later. I am talking about cable tv and the arrival of Fox Soccer Channel. Cultural manna called the English Premier League and the source of endless discussion, debate, and enjoyment. Duncan was on track to have been a professional soccer player himself until a knee injury suffered in his late teens forced that career change. He had great insight into the game, and it was the easiest thing to pass an hour on the phone every day during the last years of his illness. Before that, of course, he was healthy and busy and working, and we would only chat occasionally.

We are all experiencing a great loss, and especially Elizabeth, with Duncan's passing. This kind of void does not get filled. It will always be just that – unfilled.

On a trip to Scotland back in the 90's Duncan and Elizabeth went to the Isle of Lewis and visited with my parents. More

recently I visited Duart Castle in Mull and saw Duncan in the group photos taken during the various clan parliaments. Duncan enjoyed looking at the Glasgow Herald on line, and he was always ready to pass on aspects of Scottish life that aroused his curiosity, and especially if it involved humour.

What I mean is this. That whole point of reference is now not there anymore, and will be so missed. But to follow Duncan's example is to be up-beat and positive, to see the flask as half full, and not half empty. He had unfinished business what with the house construction and with researching his grandfather's sea-faring exploits, and kept looking ahead towards retirement. So, to finish, in spite of the illness, and the phrase he coined "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired" Duncan MacLean never gave up.