

George 'n Judy

Once upon a time, long, long ago...

...in the land called Tidewater, and in the heyday of the folk-pop singing craze, a duo dubbed George 'n Judy once strummed and sang at a number of venues on the Peninsula.

Three of those places come to mind because I was often there when they performed: Shakey's Pizza Parlor in Hampton, the Bluebeard in Newport News and Strawberry Banks in Phoebus.

Ah...Phoebus...a place which Judy often said she thought was an inner ear infection when she first heard that curious name!



Actually, over a period of several years, **Judy Ward**, a talented songstress, guitarist and dry humorist teamed musically at two different times with two different guys that coincidentally (and, I suppose, fortuitously) were named George. To avoid any possible confusion, I'll refer to them by anointing them with royal-sounding names. *George I* was a guitarist and singer named **George Britt**. He also played, on occasion, a harmonica.



George II was, and still is (more about him, later) a multi-talented lad named **George Grove** who sang, composed music and played numerous musical instruments. But let's begin at the beginning. As Judy recently recalled, regarding the formation of their singing duo with George I:

"We were introduced by a mutual friend and first sang at The Wharf in Yorktown during the summer of 1970. We were both teachers at the time; he was teaching math at Mars Hill College and I taught science at a middle school in Gloucester (I had previously graduated from Lynchburg College). We decided to just do music for a year to see if we could survive."

Although I do not remember exactly when, they later became a popular, weekly live-music feature at Shakey's Pizza Parlor & Ye Public House in Hampton, near the confusing traffic circle where Armistead Avenue and Military Highway cross. As I dimly recall, they sang there on Tuesday nights. Might have been on Wednesdays or Thursdays...it's been a long time! In any case, I am positive it was a week night, because people with whom I worked at Newport News Shipbuilding often gathered there for an evening of entertainment, pizza and beer.



Our routine was to arrive shortly before the time when the entertainment was supposed to start. I say ‘supposed’ because sometimes George I ‘n Judy were not as prompt as we were! That was not a problem, because whoever got there first would commandeer one of the long tables flanked by hard wooden benches near the faux fireplace and start ordering a variety of pizzas and pitchers of beer...lots of beer. I don’t recall what choices there were, with regard to brands. I just remember there was beer...lots and lots of beer. Some of the wives that accompanied us opted for soft drinks, but I don’t recall any of the guys ever risking the wrath of their peers by going that route. But I digress...

George I ‘n Judy would set up their sound equipment in front of the fake fireplace. As you can tell by my description, it was a real classy joint. Anyhow, they performed what were then immensely popular folk songs; stuff done by such nationally known artists as Judy Collins, Kris Kristofferson and the Kingston Trio. We knew the words to most of them. Well, at least the choruses. In between strumming guitars and singing, they told a few jokes; nothing crude, it was a family place, never mind its rustic-plastic décor.

I do not know if they were compensated by the restaurant. They had that indispensable staple of every folk singer: a tip jar. In this case, a large Shakey’s pitcher they hoped would get filled up. Of all the songs they sang and played, my personal favorite was a somewhat autobiographical tune by Canadian Ian Tyson that is more country than folk; entitled *Someday Soon*. It was first made universally popular by Judy Collins in the late 1960s. I requested it again and again, until they just said “OK” whenever I approached them; before I could even ask!



George Britt would play and sing a couple of stanzas, then go to a harmonica. He’d then join Judy in belting out the last chorus. The very last line of this song is “*Someday soon, goin’ with him, someday soon*”. Those of us who were working together at the time on what seemed to be a never-ending shipbuilding project, used to change up that last line, slightly, when we belted out: ***Someday soon, gonna finish, someday soon!***”

Rereading what I just wrote, I guess you had to be there... Anyway, I still think it’s a neat tune and often replay Judy Collins’ version, as well as that of Suzy Bogguss; a county-oriented singer whose version I actually prefer. You can hear how Judy Collins sang it, forty years ago, by going to the following Internet link:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV7T6KCMosE>

That link is only recommended for listening; the video and sound are not in sync. Or, you can listen to Suzy Bogguss’ version, recorded just last year. She has a clear, strong voice, and sings and plays more in the driving style of Judy Ward than that of Judy Collins:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6fM_jnS-MjY&feature=related

After what I recall as being a year or more, either the singers got tired of that venue or Shakey's management decided to go another route. Eventually Shakey's also became but a memory. Although the building is still there, it is currently a lawn and garden center.



Some time later, they re-emerged on the Peninsula musical scene, playing at a decidedly non-family oriented beer joint called the Bluebeard, which was located on Jefferson Avenue near Briarfield Road. Most of time, when they played there, I would go with fellow shipbuilders and infrequently with Navy guys whose ships were being completed or overhauled at NNS. Even so, I wasn't comfortable requesting songs or singing along. So I just listened and kept a sharp lookout for trouble. As I recall, the duo didn't play there for long, which may have been because George I left Virginia. According to Judy:

"Last I heard he was in Florida married to a rich lady."



The building that once housed the Bluebeard is still there, largely untouched. Except for a gaudy paint scheme and operating under a different name: Majik City - The Gentleman's Club and Sports Bar. I don't think they have live folk music there anymore!

Enter George II onto the scene. George Grove is a North Carolina native who hooked up with Judy Ward sometime in the early 1970s. I was delighted when I discovered they were playing in the restaurant at the Strawberry Banks Motor Inn, in Phoebus. At one time, that was a great place for seafood, and the dining room had a stunning, panoramic view of Hampton Roads. Today, 'The Banks' is a Hampton University dorm.

After a while, George II 'n Judy moved their performances to the lounge. Although it only had an uninspired view of the parking lot and was exposed to the constant drone of traffic on the nearby Interstate, it did have a better, but pretty smoky atmosphere conducive to their kind of entertainment. I definitely recall that they played there on Wednesday nights, albeit somewhat sporadically. Apparently, they also played at other locations and on at least two occasions performed for military personnel when they journeyed to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and Iceland.



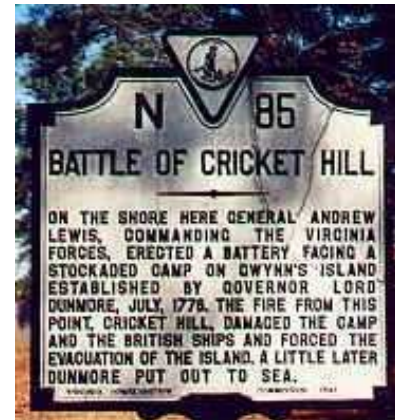
Then, on an unforgettable Wednesday night in October 1976, I was fortunate enough to be present when George Grove received what I like to refer to as “*The Calling*”.

During their break, he disappeared, but Judy relaxed at the bar having what she liked to call ‘a ladies’ drink...a beer’. Suddenly George II burst into the lounge, announcing to one and all that he had just been informed that he had been selected by the Kingston Trio to replace one of their departing members. It was a happy/sad time, for soon thereafter George ‘n Judy became but a memory.



Now a ‘short’ 33 years later, George Grove is the senior member of the Kingston Trio. Occasionally, they play one-nighters in Charlotte and some nearby cities. As often as we can, Janie and I make the scene. I have no illusion that George actually remembers me, although he always says he does. However, whenever I have the opportunity, I mention to him that I was there at ‘The Banks’ the night of “*The Calling*”. He remembers *that*, for sure!

Judy Ward went back to her roots and now lives on Gwynn’s Island, Virginia, where she was born and raised. Her musical career continued, even expanded. She had a rock and roll band for a while and then teamed up with David Shuber, one-time band director at Mathews High School. They played and recorded as Judy and David.



Judy met David in 1976, when she created a historical musical as part of the bicentennial celebration. David played the lead in Judy’s production, entitled *The Battle of Cricket Hill*, which commemorated a local Revolutionary War action.

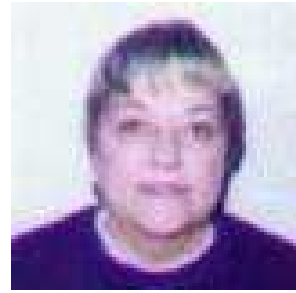
Even later, she sang and played for several years at a now-defunct restaurant in nearby Deltaville, accompanied by her nephew. These days her public appearances are limited to playing and singing in church. I learned all this ‘post-George n Judy’ history when I tracked her down about a year ago.

She was delighted that someone still remembered both editions of the George ‘n Judy years. When I wistfully lamented that I didn’t have a recording of them singing, she kindly sent me a tape of Christmas songs that she and David recorded several years ago. Time has not diminished her talent, in the slightest!

Christmas JUDY & DAVID



Currently, she has a 'day job' with the Mathews County Sheriff's Office and she also dabbles (her choice of word) in real estate. Unfortunately, I do not have, nor can I find any memorabilia pertaining to or photos of either version of the George 'n Judy duo. However, one reasonably current, but unfortunately fuzzy picture of her does appear on a real estate company's web site. The face is the same, but her long, straight 60's/hippie-inspired hairdo style is apparently history.



I live in constant fear that she'll find out I used this picture!

~ Postscript ~

After somewhat haphazardly trying to find Judy Ward for a couple of years, I made mention of my fruitless search efforts to **Dave Spriggs**, a Newport News native whose skill in tracking down people and information far exceeds my own.

Always up to a challenge, he found the photo displayed above and a snail-mail address for her that I was able to use to re-establish contact. Dave also visited two of the places where George 'n Judy once played, and provided me with the up-to-date photos of what were once Shakey's (in Hampton) and The Bluebeard (in Newport News) that appear on a previous page.

Thanks to him, what might have only been a 'one-pager' of vague memories became much more. He will be rewarded...*someday soon*.

Bill Lee
October 2009