

Helen Marketti's Music Corner

Special Guests at the Grand Ole Opry

For Clyde resident, Larry Nyfenger, a September day in 1958 brought about memories that have lasted a lifetime.

"I always liked country music even before I was a teenager," said Larry. "Back in those days there was no such thing as FM radio. All we had was AM radio with a few stations where you could hear country music. There was WWVA out of Wheeling, West Virginia or Clear Channel 650 out of Nashville which was the Grand Ole Opry."

"I had several mentors as I was growing up who were great at science and mathematics. They would be considered the nerds of our day. (laughs) I was given a transistor before Philco even heard of one. I made my own radio out of a transistor, a 6-volt battery, a pair of earphones and a bunch of wire. If I wanted to change a station, I just moved the wire clip and that worked even better than the car radio."

Larry continues, "I was 17 years old when I joined the Army. They had a "deal" going then that if you enlisted with your friends, you would be sent to the same place. Well, it didn't work that way at all. I went into the 101st Airborne. I went through basic training, advanced infantry training, jump school and also recon school which was always kept hush-hush."

"At this point it is 1958 and I'm stationed at Fort Campbell with the 101st Airborne. Its only 55 miles from Nashville. I wanted to get to Nashville and see it for myself. I was part of the STRACK unit, which meant we were on alert for 24/7. We even had to wear our uniforms off base," recalls Larry.

"So one day my friend, Albert and I went to Nashville because I wanted to see the Grand Ole Opry. I really didn't expect a whole lot. It was a Saturday when we went and we saw a line of people at least 4 to 5 wide and it went around the whole block. It was right in the middle of downtown Nashville."

"I was standing near the line in my uniform, feeling proud. I had just gotten my wings pinned on so I felt pretty sharp," said Larry. "Albert and I were deciding what we should do next when all of a sudden a black Cadillac pulls up into the alley way where we were standing. A man got out of the car first and he was all dressed up with a cowboy hat on. He was very slender and looked like he

was seven feet tall. Well, it was Mr. Ernest Tubb. (Ernest Tubb was known as The Texas Troubadour and pioneer of country music.) His wife followed him out of the car and she walked over to us. Ernest then walked over and asked us if we had tickets for the show."

"There were two shows scheduled for that day. We said we didn't have any tickets and Ernest said, "Give me a minute." He got back in the car and drove off. A few minutes later a man came over to us, and said, "Mr. Tubb would like you to see the show. He has a couple of seats for you."

"As Albert and I followed him, we thought we would get VIP seating in the front row or something like that," said Larry. "I noticed the stage was very large. The place was packed and it was a very hot day. The people who were standing outside were already there for the evening show. Anyway, Albert and I were wondering where we were going to sit when we saw this guy walking towards us with two folding chairs. He sat the chairs on the stage and said, "You boys can sit right here." We were seated on the stage for the show! We couldn't believe it!"

"We watched everyone walk in. We saw Kitty Wells. Willie Nelson was there too. He had on a tie. We also saw George Jones with his flat top haircut. It was really something to see. The stage manager (Roy Acuff) arranged for us to have drinks brought to us, which were two RC Colas. It was complete organized chaos but it was an awesome experience."

Larry continues, "After the show, Ernest Tubb walked over to us and said, "If you guys want to walk around the corner to my record shop, that is where the second half of the show is going to be." Albert and I walked around the corner and sure enough, there was a neon sign that said, "Ernest Tubb Record Shop." We went inside and I don't think the place was any bigger than a double garage but it was long. They had a stage set up in the back. That place was packed like sardines in can. We saw Marty Robbins and Patsy Cline, too. Another thing that I noticed was that fans gave them their space and respected them. We never saw anyone trying to get an autograph or asking for a photo. The artists were never mobbed. It was one of the most amazing experiences of my life and I will never forget it."

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