

A Brief History of Ted Goon by his son, Robert Goon

The following is information on Theodore J. Goon aka Mr. Goon Bones. This is all from recollection and some of the dates may be off as a result of a fading memory.

Theodore John Goon (who went by Ted or T.J.) was born in Michigan on July 10, 1911 and died in Santa Monica, California, on August 3, 2003. He grew up on a farm in Wauseon, Ohio. He had three brothers and one sister. Only his younger brother Warren Goon is still living.

I suspect you already know the story of how he got interested in bones playing, but I will summarize what I know. When he was a youth on the farm, traveling minstrel shows were in vogue. Bones players were featured in the minstrel shows. He became fascinated by bones players and made bones from animal ribs--pig ribs, as I recall hearing. He taught himself how to play. Although he was right-handed he was also significantly ambidextrous and a remarkably coordinated athlete, as a result of which he was able to play quite well with both hands. He also had an uncanny sense of rhythm.

When he graduated from high school, he left home and went to Monrovia, California, a suburb of Los Angeles, where his older sister Margaret and her husband lived. He got a job with the gas company and enrolled in and spent three years at UCLA, which was then known as University of California, Southern Branch, and located on Vermont Street in central Los Angeles. Later, the name was changed to University of California at Los Angeles and it was relocated to the current campus in west Los Angeles commonly known as Westwood.

He became a life insurance agent for Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in the greater Los Angeles area. He was married and divorced. When the United States entered World War II, he enlisted in the US Army, went through basic training, and then went through Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as a first lieutenant in the infantry.

He served as a company commander training troops for combat. He became an expert in hand-to-hand combat. Before he was scheduled to be shipped overseas for his own combat duty in Europe, he was seriously injured in a hand-to-hand combat training session that disqualified him from combat duty. After that, he served as an inspector of stateside prisoner of war camps under the direction of the War Department. He served a total of five years of active duty in the army and returned to civilian life in 1945. (Due to some quirk that he never fully understood, he was not discharged from the army until many years later and then he

was retired--possibly as the oldest first lieutenant in the army.)

While stationed at an army camp outside the small town in Alabama where my divorced mother, sister, and I were then living in the early 40s, Ted Goon met my mother at a dance hosted by the local country club for soldiers at the camp. When the war ended in 1945, he came back to Alabama, married my mother, and took her, my sister, and me to live in California.

We lived for a brief period in Santa Ana and then moved to nearby Corona del Mar, California, about 50 miles south of Los Angeles. My parents built a small house in Corona del Mar. Ted Goon went back into the life insurance business. Somewhere along the way, he started pursuing his hobby with the bones with a passion. He practiced and practiced and experimented and experimented until he developed his own unique style and got very good at playing and entertaining. From my perspective, it is hard to imagine that he was not the best bones player who ever lived. In his prime, he could do things with bones that I never saw anyone else do and could not imagine anyone else doing. He was a perfectionist.

He did a bunch of amateur gigs. He formed a trio. I remember the accordion player Barney Lantz but I best remember the organist who replaced him—Ralph Ford. I vaguely remember the bass player Ricardo something. The trio performed professionally at clubs, made some television appearances, and cut a number of records. My dad was very creative when it came to rhythm patterns and orchestration even though he did not read music. I guess their recording of Ain't She Sweet with an echo chamber effect and my mother and a neighborhood friend clapping in the background was the biggest hit. But the club circuit was too hard on family life and my dad and his trio eventually abandoned pursuit of fame and fortune in show business. My dad went back into business.

My family sold our house in Corona del Mar and moved back to Alabama in 1950. Ted Goon worked in the finance business. He put on some performances at the local high school and created a local radio show involving our entire family. We recorded it in a studio but it was presented to the public as if someone had hidden a microphone in our home and was hearing our family conversation around the dinner table. It was cute and well received. Many people were taken in by the promotion and actually believed they were listening in on our private life without us knowing we were being broadcast.

We moved to Santa Monica, California, in 1952. Ted Goon went into the real estate business. In 1957, he got an offer from a company that I believe was named National School Assemblies and that sponsored performances at high schools in the western states to go on the road. He

and my mother did that for several years. Sometimes they did two or three shows a day, driving all over the western United States in good and bad weather. He put together a comedic skit including a discourse on the history of bones playing, costumes, gags including my mother, and show-stopping bones playing. It was a huge hit wherever they went. I think they enjoyed the experience of traveling together and meeting people around the country, but life on the road became hard and they were ready to settle back down after a few years.

They then returned to Corona del Mar around 1960 and bought back the same house we had built and lived in prior to moving to Alabama in 1950. Around 1962, they sold that house a second time and moved to west Los Angeles to be closer to my sister and me. Ted Goon went to work for the United States Veterans Administration in property management.

My older sister Louise was a guitar-playing ballad singer. In 1957, while in college at UCLA, she married a comedian who had MC'd a USO troop in performing at military bases around the world. (He eventually became a comedy actor in several television sitcoms before turning to a successful career in commercials and television screenwriting.) My sister and her husband continued to do USO tours after they were married. In the early 60s, my parents joined their troop for USO tours in Alaska and Japan.

That pretty much ended my dad's professional bones-playing career. My dad finished his career with the Veterans Administration and retired sometime in the 70s. My mother died in 1981. A couple of years later, Ted Goon married Barbara and moved to Northern California where she was living. A few years later, they moved to Southern California. She died in December 2003 and he died eight months later.